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Great Escapism
J.R.R. Tolkien's enduring pre-industrial fantasy

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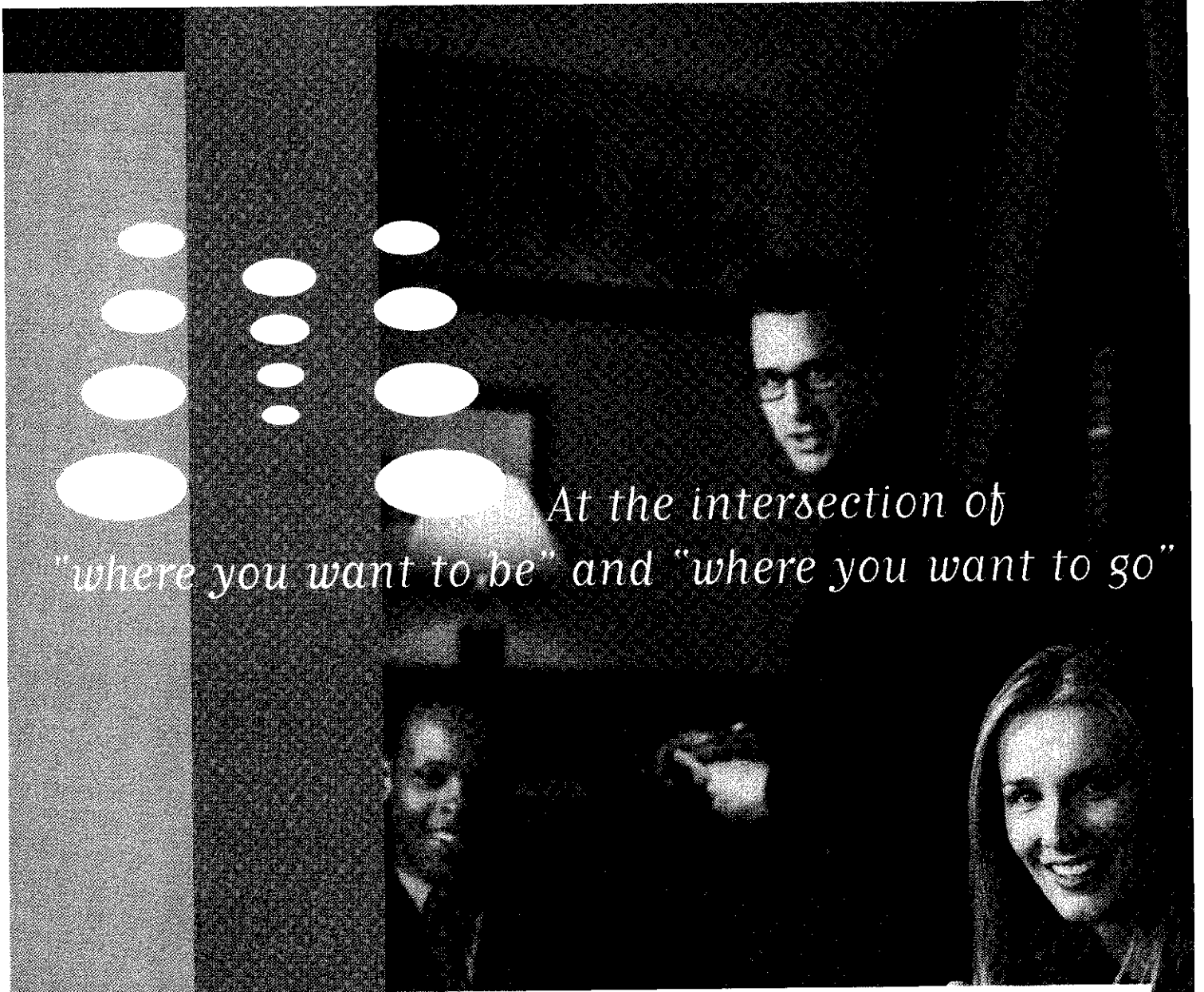

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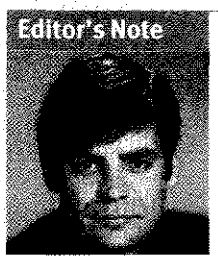

Looking for Hate in All the Wrong Places

"I'M A LAWYER, but my dad was a shoemaker."

That's my favorite line in this month's often hilarious cover story about "the long, happy life of America's anti-defamation industry" ("E Pluribus Umbrage," page 24). The speaker is Ted Grippo, head of Chicago's American-Italian Defense Association, and his statement neatly summarizes the absurdity that infuses too many discussions about racial, religious, and ethnic identities. "Since 1930, we've had over 800 Mafia-type movies. I can't tell you how many times I've been asked if I'm connected," he tells **reason**'s Web editor, Tim Cavanaugh.

I can identify with Grippo's complaint—my maternal grandparents emigrated from Campania in the 1910s. There's no question that my older relatives' opportunities were limited by negative attitudes about Italians. There's also no question that my cousins and I, growing up only a few decades later, faced no such problems.

Grippo, like many anti-defamation activists, seems almost desperate to keep the bad old days of ethnic and religious enmity alive. For him, unmistakable progress is a warrant for heightened sensitivity and legal action, not evidence of waning levels of prejudice and discrimination. Last year he brought a lawsuit (eventually dismissed) against Time Warner Entertainment, alleging that the hit HBO show *The Sopranos* ran afoul of the Illinois state constitution's anti-discrimination clause.

What Grippo might not appreciate is that *The Sopranos* does an excellent job of lampooning his misplaced sense of victimization. This season's episode about a Native American protest of Columbus Day drove home the point that fewer and fewer groups can lay claim to the sort of exclusion that once marked much of American life.

The episode featured self-pitying speeches by gangsters and suspiciously timed discoveries of Indian blood by opportunistic casino owners. It also presaged a real-life flap in which the organizers of New York's Columbus Day parade refused to allow two *Sopranos* stars to march. Why? "The show stereotypes the Italo-American family in the worst way....Besides the whole crime element, it shows Italo-Americans as uneducated, low-life brutes."

While such a charge is false on the most basic level of description, it captures the sense of outrage and wounded pride that is nearly universal in an America that has never been more diverse and inclusive. However misguided, such sentiments are "useful in forming cultural identity, particularly where such identity is fading or never existed in the first place," writes Cavanaugh. "This may explain why anti-discrimination is a growth industry even—or especially—while identity politics fades into history, more Americans decline to identify themselves by ethnicity, and actual discrimination is, by virtually all measures, at historically low levels."

In a counterintuitive yet compelling way, the richness and frenzy of our "umbrage market" may well be the leading indicator that we're more of a melting pot than ever.

Nick Gillespie

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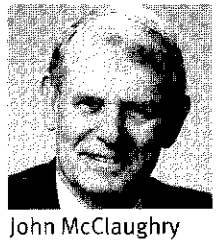

John McClaughry

EVEN IN A sluggish economy, special education remains a growth industry, reveals LISA SNELL in "Special Education Confidential" (page 40). Snell is the director of the Reason Public Policy Institute's education program, but her most dispiriting encounters with pedagogical bankruptcy have been personal. As a college instructor in public speaking, Snell found that "students didn't have the grammatical or rhetorical skills to write a speech, let alone give one." Her last feature for **reason** was the August-September 2001 cover story, "Schoolhouse Crock," which related the dismal track record of her son Jacob's public elementary school. As of this fall, Jake is receiving exemplary instruction—from Snell and her husband, at home in Orange County, California.

CHRIS MOONEY, who discusses high-tech *Lord of the Rings* paraphernalia ("Great Escapism," page 51), doesn't rank himself as a "serious" J.R.R. Tolkien buff. He does admit to dressing as a Ring Wraith once for Halloween, but insists it was only a half-hearted attempt. Besides, he says, "I've been told by serious fans that my views on Tolkien just aren't hardcore enough." Mooney is a contributing writer for *The American Prospect*. In a former incarnation as the magazine's Web editor, he created the popular weblog *Tapped*.

"I love living back in the hills," says Contributing Editor JOHN MCCLAUGHRY, adding that "it's far from all the issues raised in my piece in this issue." He reviews *Putting Faith in Neighborhoods*, Stephen Goldsmith's account of his tenure as mayor of Indianapolis ("Mustering the Little Platoons," page 59). McClaughry, once a state senator, now lives in Kirby, Vermont, population 490. He also knows city life, having lived off and on in Washington, D.C., for two decades. There, he spearheaded federal efforts to increase inner-city home and business ownership, and later advised the Reagan White House. Today, McClaughry heads Vermont's Ethan Allen Institute (www.ethanallen.org), the free-market think tank that he founded in 1993.

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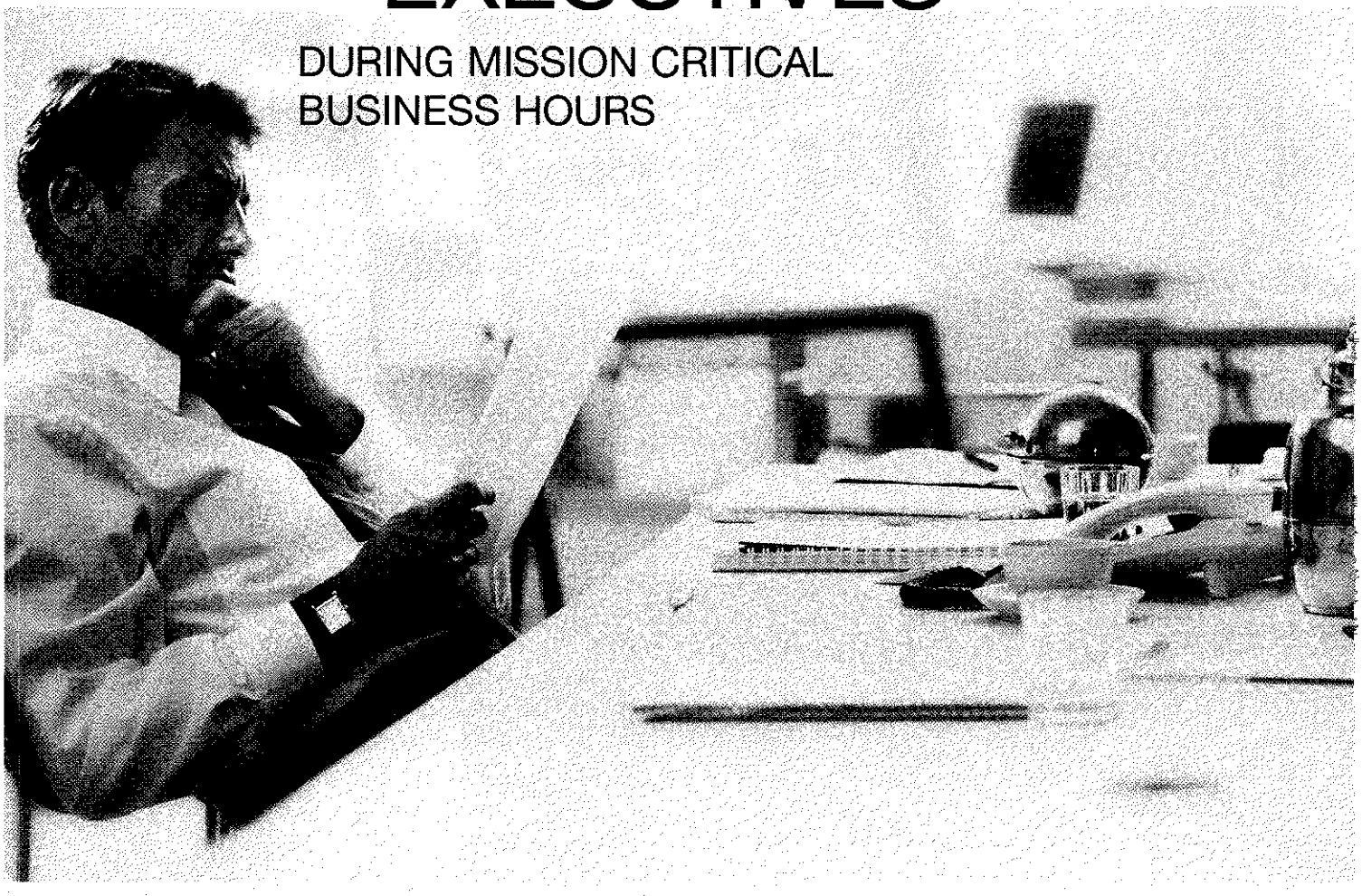

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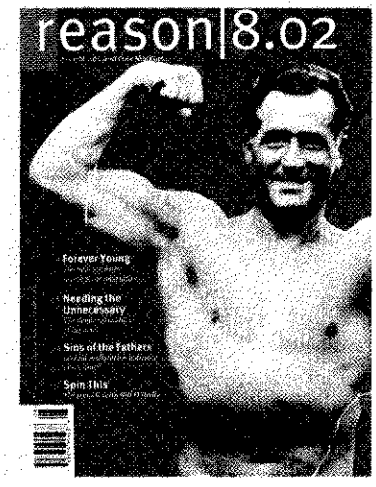

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Potions of Youth

Mock-starvation pills, cultured organ replacements, and sapphire vasculoids aside, it is evident even from Ronald Bailey's jovial, optimistic, go-for-it! summary of current longevity research ("Forever Young," August/September) that true near-immortality will come only when scientists figure out how to make our bodies stop producing free radicals.

That's like wishing for someone to figure out cold fusion. It's all very captivating, but there's no reason to be shouting that immortality is just around the bend. Scientists have to be optimistic if they are to win grants and investment money, but Bailey could stand to be a little less gullible.

What is interesting is his final rant regarding conservative arguments against longevity research. Bailey is right to laugh at pundits who say that life without death would not be life. Life is life, whether tempered by the knowledge of death (as with *Homo sapiens*) or not (as with other species, or so we think).

At the same time, the idea that awareness of our mortality causes us to be better people is worth serious consideration. Indeed, great philosophers have addressed this question in some depth.

Take the classical-modern philosopher Miguel de Unamuno. In *The Tragic Sense of Life,* he writes that "consciousness and finality are fundamentally the same thing." Could he be right? Could every moment of conscious thought be ordered by its ineluctable end? In fact, isn't that exactly how we experience life, as a series of finalities? What would immortality do to that? Would we recognize ourselves? Bailey acts like these are silly questions.

Unamuno says that we should all run out into the streets crying about our mortality, that death is what makes us love one another. What if he's right, and without death we would all be insufferable, like the sadistic Greek gods from *Star Trek*? What then?

I'm not against radical longevity; let the future take care of itself, I say. Let science do its thing; it will anyway, whether or not U.S. presidents and senators endorse it. But let's not be too quick to worship the God of Technology, until we know its fruits.

April Susky
Anchorage, AK

In "Forever Young," I read once again the idea that severe calorie restriction can extend human life spans. And once again I did *not* read anything about the major downside to severe calorie restrictions—and I don't mean hunger pangs!

Eating less than two-thirds of the normal baseline calorie requirements produces a number of effects in humans. The first, of course, is weight loss. But you don't just lose fat, you lose lean body mass.

Weight loss slows as the metabolism adapts to continued energy deficiencies. The decrease in metabolism results in hypothyroidism. So people who severely restrict their calories may live longer, but they will suffer from weakness, lethargy, fatigue, depression, diminished libido, and inability to concentrate.

Can you imagine living decades with those symptoms? A life like that would seem like hell on earth.

Gregory Tetrault, M.D.
Chesapeake, VA

Ronald Bailey replies: April Susky is right that so long as humans retain anything like our current metabolisms, handling free radicals is the problem to be solved by aging research. We can't

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wish them away, but as detailed in my article, researchers are already devising techniques and therapies aimed at preventing and repairing the damage they cause. The result may not be immortality, but it should significantly lengthen life.

As for my "rant" against conservative opponents of longevity research, I do not say that they (and Unamuno) don't have a valid point about how the knowledge of our mortality sometimes inspires our better natures. It does. I do say that fear of death doesn't just motivate us to "love one another." If it did, we mortals wouldn't be so busy killing each other. The point is certainly not to worship technology, but we must also not so fear it that we outlaw scientific research that threatens the fixed ideas of human nature and human destiny propounded by some more timid souls.

Finally, Gregory Tetrault doesn't dispute that severe calorie restriction may boost practitioners' life expectancies, but he is absolutely correct about the discomforts suffered by many who try it as a way to boost their longevity. The point of living is to enjoy it; just enduring is not enough.

Sins of the Fathers

Thomas Szasz's otherwise well-argued article, "Sins of the Fathers" (August/September), suggests that there is no difference in the level of obsession between sex offenders and others. He quotes a study showing that the rearrest record for sex offenders is 52 percent and for all other violent offenders it is 60 percent.

As someone who has reviewed scores of studies, I must say that one should not base their argument on just one, given that the data vary greatly from one study to another. Most important, if one relies on reoffense rates, rather than rearrest rates, the figure for sex abusers is much higher. The reason is that most sex offenses go unreported, as many are within families.

Amitai Etzioni
George Washington University
Washington, DC

I have often wondered why Thomas Szasz chose to make psychiatry his profession, when he is so clearly uninterested in human psychology. Rather, he seems to have made a career of proclaiming that the mentally ill, and those who care for them, are malingerers or worse. Amazingly, everyone but Szasz is always wrong and immoral.

As a child psychologist, I insist that my profession is characterized by professionals who are not only moral but caring, actively seeking not to bestow blame but to find a way to make things better. Out of their concern for morality, they seek to learn how children learn to be more moral people. A good example is the work of Fritz Redl and David Wineman in *Children Who Hate* and *Controls From Within*.

Psychoanalysis gave us the concept of the superego (conscience) and its more flexible successor, the rational, reality-centered ego. It is worth remembering that despite all efforts to discredit Freud and his followers, we have found no more comprehensive theory to guide us in raising children ready to accept, and not rebel against, thoughtful morality.

But I will agree with Szasz in his concern about nomenclature. In particular, the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders III-R* contains diagnostic codes for both sadism and masochism. These are established concepts about which there is a wealth of literature. Yet both inexplicably disappear from *DSM-IV*. Are we to suppose that sadism and masochism are now to be considered normal? In these troubled times one may well wonder, but at any rate psychiatry owes us an explanation. Or does the APA agree with Szasz that if we can label a behavior "immoral" there is no need to understand it?

Perhaps we should convert all our psychiatric facilities to prisons? Oops, I forgot: We already did that.

Nancy Rader
Acton, MA

The deconstructing *Myth of Mental Illness* author has obviously never known a child molester: Of course they don't "treat themselves as if they had a disease before they are apprehended."

Szasz demonstrates the black-and-white thinking characteristic of an ineffective, know-it-all, "tolerant," politically correct meme—rampant in academia—in his inability to hold two thoughts at once: Sex with children is both a crime (immoral) and an illness requiring definition and treatment. It's both the ill person's problem and ours.

S. A. Silva
West Hollywood, CA

Thomas Szasz replies: In "Sins of the Fathers" I argued that, as adults, we ought to resist impulses (obsessions, compulsions) to harm others, not use psychiatrists to make excuses for our failures to do so. The nonreporting of sex offenses in the family has nothing to do with this issue.

Understandably, child psychologists insist that they do good. I have documented (elsewhere) that they do evil and therefore maintain that child psychology (psychiatry) is child abuse. Psychiatrists and those who believe their mendacities claim that mental illnesses are brain diseases, on a par with

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neurological diseases, such as Parkinsonism and stroke. There is not a single neurological disease that is also a crime.

Technology and Genius

Charles Paul Freund poses a provocative question in the subtitle of "Traces of Genius" (August/September): Is art sullied by technology? He seems to think it never is. Yet the practice he examines—the tracing by painters of photographs (or other optical images) projected directly onto a canvas—is cheating, plain and simple, and the resultant work is not art. In Freund's view, such tracing enhances art. Unfortunately, he offers little more than misinformation in support of his argument and succeeds only in distorting art history.

To cite the most egregious example, Freund makes much of the fact that recent studies have established that Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), who may well be America's greatest painter, "actually 'traced' photographic images" in the manner described above. Readers might well infer from Freund's account that this was Eakins' practice throughout his long and distinguished career, even in the making of his widely acclaimed portraits (mostly of people he admired). That is not the case.

Eakins did indeed use photographs for reference (a legitimate practice) from about 1872—but he also utilized live models, costumes, and props, and drew upon a deep knowledge of perspective and anatomy. He did trace on occasion. As I note in my review of the recent retrospective of his work at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (see "What's New" at www.aristos.org/editors/booksumm.htm), Eakins preferred to work from life, and there exists no evidence that he traced from projected photographs in creating any of the portraits, or that he traced in any works at all after about 1885.

At the end of his article, Freund claims that science (including optics) was the key factor underlying the explosion of great art from the 15th through the 17th centuries and has remained so ever since: "The evidence is on every gallery wall, and it becomes more visible each year."

In fact, much acclaimed art these days is not on walls at all! And the "evidence" in today's galleries points mostly to charlatanism, not to "genius." In one recent instance, the alleged artist rigged the electrical system in an otherwise empty gallery so that a bare light bulb (that technological marvel) hanging from the middle of the ceiling went on and off every few minutes.

Louis Torres
New York, NY

Charles Paul Freund observes that some art critics are uncomfortable with technology's supposed debasement of the creative process. Their discomfort is based on a myth that creativity is some sort of spiritual ability that defies rational explanation. In reality, creativity is nothing more than the ability to combine unrelated but existing things in new ways. Creative genius is marked by an exceptional ability to do this. In other words, the creative individual neither creates *ex nihilo*, nor is strictly a product of the environment. Creation is the result of interaction between the individual and the environment.

According to this logic, a caveman, no matter how smart, could not have conceived of a 747. As we have seen in the history of aviation, the first known concepts of flying machines were based on the emulation of birds. Eventually moving wings gave way to fixed wings, "flapping" propulsion to rotating fixed blades powered by the newly developed internal combustion engine, and the first real aircraft was born. Certainly the men who developed subsequent advances such as monocoque construction, jet engines, and supersonic flight were creative and even geniuses, but the process is more evolutionary than revolutionary.

In art and music as well, one can appreciate the genius of the work yet still discern the pre-existing elements from which it was built. Jimi Hendrix, for example, is known for his complete reinvention of the sound of the electric guitar in modern popular music. As revolutionary as he was, and as unique as his playing still sounds, all the elements of it were present when he started to be noticed in the late 1960s. His note choices and phrasing are largely based on the blues and the R&B sounds of musicians like Curtis Mayfield, and he certainly could not have made the otherworldly sounds he is best known for without the era's new technologies, such as the wah pedal, the Univibe, and Octavia effects.

It may be distressing to some who feel a need to worship heroes to think of creation in this manner, but it does not diminish the significance of the accomplishment or the respect due to individuals who exhibit exceptional ability in this regard. What this understanding provides is the knowledge that creativity is a skill which we can all strive to improve, and that our efforts to do so will ultimately make the world a more interesting and hopefully better place to live.

Jim Nelson
Via e-mail

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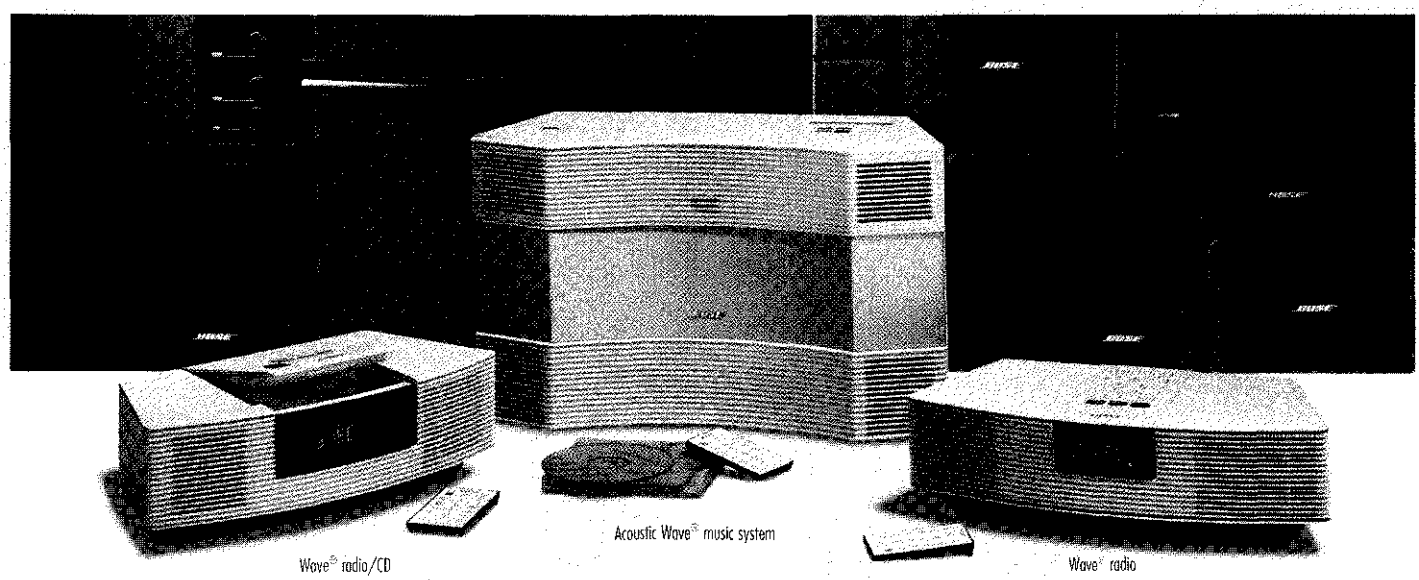

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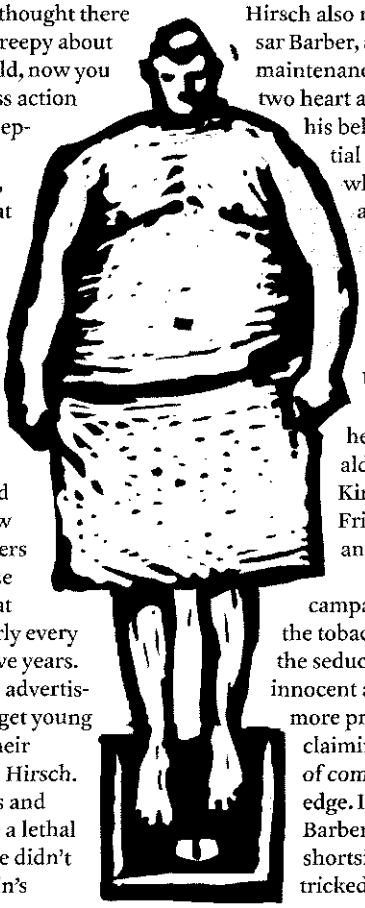
Pleasure wars; Argentine revolution; freeing prehistoric man; Edison's bad math; private space voyages; where the troops are; and civil liberties free for all

Fast food lawsuits

Big Fat Idiots

Jacob Sullum

IF YOU ALWAYS thought there was something creepy about Ronald McDonald, now you know why. A class action lawsuit filed in September puts the baggy-trousered, red-haired icon at the center of a conspiracy to entice America's children into a debilitating diet full of saturated fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar.



The three lead plaintiffs are New York City teenagers of formidable size who have eaten at McDonald's nearly every day for at least five years. "We feel that the advertising strategies target young children," said their attorney, Samuel Hirsch. "Toy promotions and Happy Meals are a lethal combination." He didn't mention the chain's ubiquitous playgrounds—probably because the opportunity for exercise they offer might be seen as mitigating McDonald's guilt.

Hirsch also represents Caesar Barber, a middle-aged maintenance man with two heart attacks under his belt and substantial flab above it, who for decades assumed that cheeseburgers, onion rings, and fried chicken were health foods. Upon discovering his error, he sued McDonald's, Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Wendy's.

As in the campaign against the tobacco industry, the seduction-of-the-innocent angle seems more promising than claiming ignorance of common knowledge. Indeed, was not Barber once a naive, shortsighted youth, tricked into unhealthy habits he now finds it difficult to break?

"This is nothing more than a frivolous lawsuit," a McDonald's spokesman said in response to Hirsch's latest effort. "Its claims are ridiculous." It wasn't clear why he thought that was relevant.

One man's war on pleasure

Stuffed Face

Charles Paul Freund

SAMUEL HIRSCH ISN'T taking on McDonald's alone [see story above]. Law professor John Banzhaf, best-known as an anti-smoker obsessive, is serving as an adviser and researcher on his case. This summer he turned up on one of Charles Osgood's folksy CBS Radio reports, telling listeners that the various claims made by the fast food industry in its defense were no different from those offered by tobacco companies, "and we beat them."

But Prof. Banzhaf, his vainglory notwithstanding, didn't "beat" any tobacco companies. Big Tobacco remains hugely profitable and is even benefiting from the investment of state

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"tobacco windfall" funds. What Banzhaf and his smoker-hating allies did was to use Big Tobacco and state power to beat up on smokers, taking money from mostly low-income people while marginalizing them socially. That's one of Banzhaf's specialties: using the courts to hurt relatively powerless people, then claiming a mantle of courage for it.

The key to Banzhaf's repellent career is his effort in the mid-1990s to stamp out "Ladies' Night" promotions in Washington, D.C., bars. On Ladies' Night, women get a price break on drinks. That means more female customers, and thus more male customers anxious to meet them. The long-established practice satisfies everybody involved.

Everybody but Banzhaf. He saw the promotions as a privilege for one sex and thus a violation of the D.C. Human Rights Act. Banzhaf began a campaign of legal harassment, but not against the bars. Rather, Banzhaf targeted the local weekly, the *City Paper*, where the bars advertised. "If [bars] can't advertise" Ladies' Nights, he told a reporter, "more than half the value is gone." *City Paper* reluctantly caved, agreeing to police future ads for "discriminatory" language, thus becoming Banzhaf's agent of righteousness against men and women who might want to meet each other.

It was undistilled Banzhaf. The issue for him is rarely "injustice"; it is the terrifying possibility that somewhere there are people enjoying themselves, smoking, flirting, or even munching fries. ▯

Hate and free speech

Sins of the Author

Sara Rimensnyder

"THE DUMBEST RELIGION, after all, is Islam."

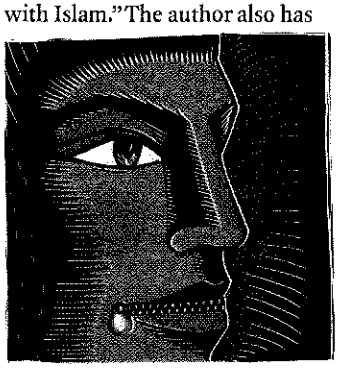
So spoke best-selling French author and provocateur Michel Houellebecq just days before September 11, 2001, in an interview with the magazine *Lire*. He also called the Koran "mediocre" and said he considers the scriptures of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all to be "texts of hate." His statements, not surprisingly, infuriated Muslim organizations. Here's what *is* surprising: In September 2002, Houellebecq was brought before a criminal court for uttering those words. He faced up to a year in prison or a $51,000 fine.

In the U.S., Houellebecq would be protected by the First Amendment. Not so in France. Four Muslim groups, along with an organization called the Human Rights League, pressed charges, arguing that the author's statements incited racism. A 1972 law "bans hate speech, making racial defamation and provocation to racial hatred or violence punishable by criminal law," according to a 2001 Brookings Institution paper cited on the weblog Emmanuelle.net. *Lire* was also charged for publishing the interview.

Houellebecq has said the interview was "crooked," indicating that the magazine edited his words to imply that he—like the lead character in his most recent novel, *Plateform*—was "obsessed with Islam." The author also has argued that his statements were against Islam, not against Muslims. "I do not see how criticizing a religion in an acerbic manner involves them as people," he said.

But Dalil Boubakeur of the Paris Mosque told the court: "Freedom of expression stops where it can do harm....I believe my community is humiliated, my religion is insulted, I ask for justice."

At press time, the court had yet to make its ruling. Judging by the brigade of intellectuals who showed up to testify in Houellebecq's defense, he is unlikely to be found guilty. Nevertheless, taxpayers can look forward to footing the bill for more of such cases. Next up: French Muslim groups plan to file charges against Italian journalist Orianna Fallaci for calling Muslims "a billion rats." ▯



Spontaneous assemblies

Argentine Revolution

Jesse Walker

LATE LAST YEAR, Argentina plunged into political turmoil as the economy collapsed, the president fled, and angry citizens rioted, at one point storming Congress and looting the legislature's furniture. One can scarcely blame the rioters: The Argentine government, long enmeshed in crony capitalism, had been looting the citizens' wealth for much longer. In 1998 its policies plunged the country into recession, and its economy is showing no signs of a recovery.

Since then, the outside world has been generous with detailed plans for reform. But even as Argentina's rulers contend with competing schemes, of domestic origin as well as foreign, ordinary Argentines are enacting reforms of their own, building parallel institutions to fill the void left by the collapsing state.

The most famous of these are the neighborhood assemblies that have sprouted in the cities, especially Buenos Aires, as an alternative to normal party politics. The function and makeup of these bodies vary from one »

Quote

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assembly to another. They have naturally attracted the usual would-be vanguards of the socialist revolution, and many are, in the words of *The Economist*, mere "talking shops for bearded leftists."

Others, however, have bought food in bulk at reduced prices, set up canteens and community gardens, opened neighborhood banks, negotiated with landlords and utilities, and sent their best tinkers to reconnect members to the power grid when they fall behind on their bills. The groups are organized with as little hierarchy as possible, and their most popular slogan, according to the Inter Press Service, is "All the politicians out."

Grassroots alternatives to the official economy have also emerged. Barter clubs have sprung up across the country, evolving quickly from cumbersome swap meets into a full-fledged alternative currency, with *creditos* redeemable for goods and services. At its peak, an estimated 6 to 10 million Argentines participated in the barter system, including doctors, manufacturers, and even railways.

As the barter network grew more popular, though, it began to fall prey to the same problems that were eating away at the country's more established institutions. Crooks started printing *creditos* of their own, inflating the currency and prompting many people to abandon it. In September the clubs responded with a new *credito* that is supposed to be harder to counterfeit. Even if this manages to revive the movement, however, it faces another problem: With poverty rampant, the goods available for barter simply aren't worth as much as they used to be. "People are just bringing in rubbish now," one organizer complained to *USA Today*. "It's all they have left."

Even so, the assemblies and the barter clubs have done more to revive Argentina than the central state, whose most notable achievements in the last year have been to devalue the currency, shoot protesters, and fail to deal with the nation's frozen banking system and $14.5 billion debt. ▮

Free Kennewick Man!

Bones of Contention

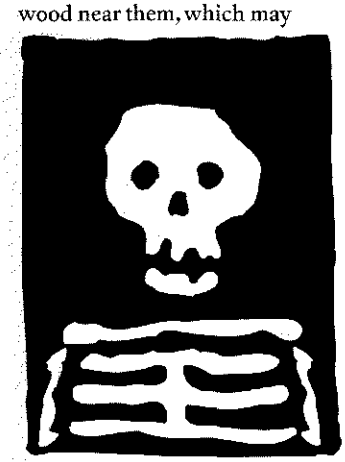
Brian Doherty

AN AUGUST DECISION by a federal magistrate in Oregon means a victory for scientific research over tribal identity politics.

Since 1996 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has kept the approximately 9,300-year-old remains of a man found in Kennewick, Washington—popularly known as "Kennewick Man"—under wraps. Scientists who have glimpsed the 350 bones and fragments say he represents an intriguing archeological mystery, since his skull shape suggests he isn't a direct ancestor of Native Americans.

But a coalition of Indian tribes claimed ownership of the bones under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. The Army Corps and the Department of the Interior under Secretary Bruce Babbitt agreed the bones should be under tribal control, meaning no sacrilegious scientific poking.

The Army Corps allowed the tribes to hold ceremonies over the bones, including burning wood near them, which may



have damaged what was a relatively pristine archeological find. A couple of femurs also went missing for years and then showed up in a local sheriff's evidence locker. The Army Corps showed further signs of trying to stymie research by dumping dirt and rocks on the site where

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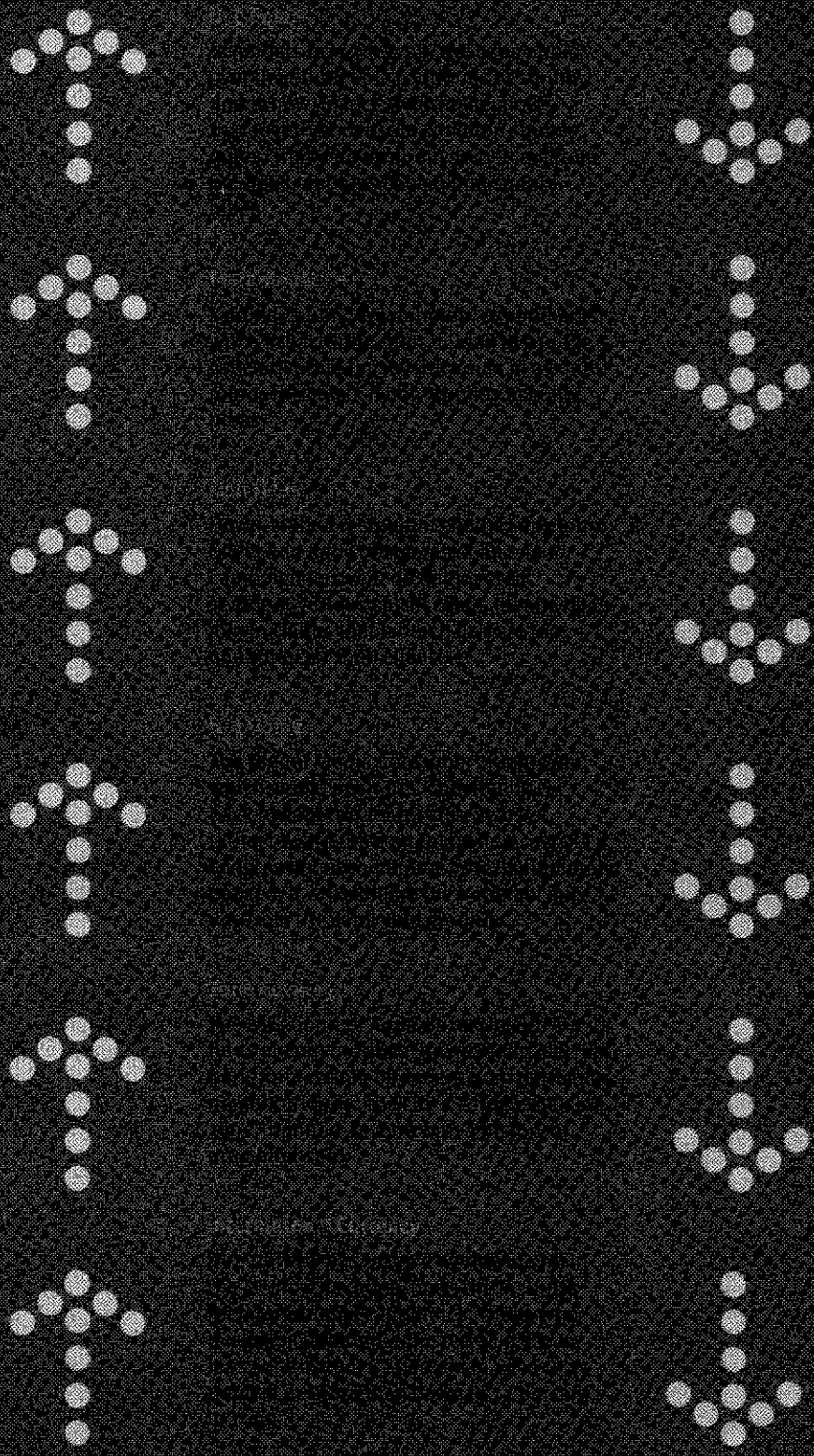
Balance Sheet



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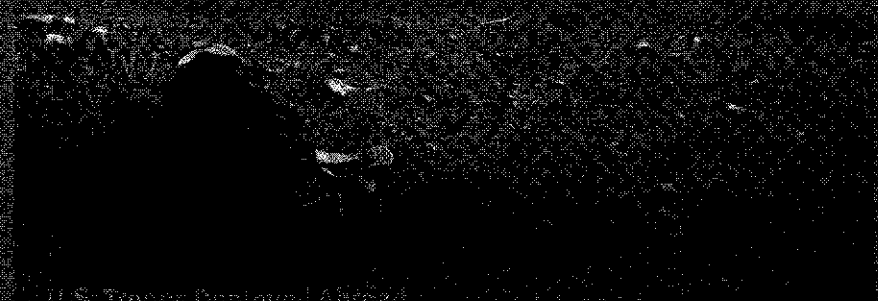
Over There



U.S. Troops Deployed Abroad

112,400	European Command (Germany, Belgium, Greece, Italy, Mediterranean, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom)
70,800	Pacific Command (Singapore, Japan, South Korea, Guam, Australia, Diego Garcia, Thailand; not counting troops in Alaska and Hawaii)
11,260	Central Command (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Nigeria)
1,080	Southern Command (Colombia and Honduras)
4,268	Joint Forces Command (Bermuda, Cuba, Iceland, Portugal)
15,460	UN and Peacekeeping Forces (Bosnia, Croatia, East Timor, Egypt, Macedonia, Georgia, Hungary, Iraq-Kuwait, Middle East, Western Sahara, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Yugoslavia)
284,068	Total

› Kennewick Man was found.

A group of scientists who want to study the bones sued, and U.S. Magistrate John Jelderks decided in their favor. He said the government had no proof there was any connection between Kennewick Man and modern tribes, given the lack of cultural materials near the site and the skeleton's structural differences from modern Native Americans.

Further study of Kennewick Man could provide insight into the ongoing controversy over whether the original inhabitants of America all walked over the Bering Strait from north Asia, as traditionally thought, or were instead the product of multiple migrations from many areas. ◼

Edison's bad math

No Dollars or Sense

Lisa Snell

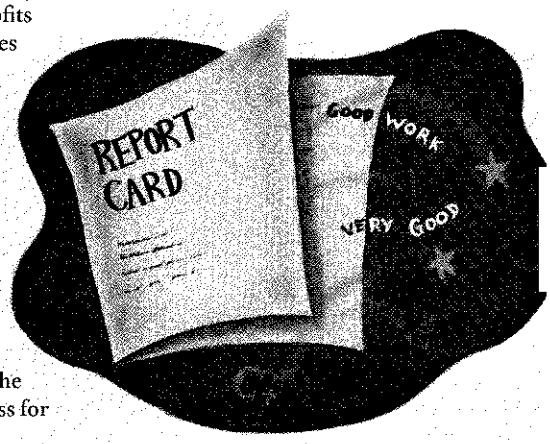
When Chris Whittle started Edison Schools Inc. a decade ago, he envisioned a "National Schooling Company" that would provide a high-quality education while securing profits through "economies of scale" made possible by operating hundreds of schools nationwide.

Fast forward to this September, when Edison declared a $49 million net loss for the fourth quarter, bringing the company's total loss for 2002 to $86 million. Edison has shelved plans to build a $125 million, 15-story headquarters in East Harlem. NASDAQ has threatened to delist Edison's stock if it doesn't rise above $1 per share by November 25. Whittle himself owes Edison schools $10 million secured by the low-performing stock—20 percent of the company's current market capitalization.

The company has lost at least six major contracts in recent months and is barely holding on to others. Last spring Edison was expecting to manage 45 Philadelphia schools this term and play the role of central manager for the city's entire school system. Since then, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* has reported that truckloads of Edison's school supplies have been repossessed. Though the company denies that allegation, it is now contracted to run only 20 schools.

Behold Edison's grim, dispiriting bottom line: The company has spent more money than it has taken in. It has nothing to do with the education industry or public education, and everything to do with too many top-level executives making six-figure salaries.

On top of that, Edison has a lousy business plan. Instead of working with individual customers, it has dealt only with large government bureaucracies. To win contracts, it gave up the integrity of its original pedagogical model. Edison sometimes sacrificed key pedagogical components (such as longer school days and more teacher training) to satisfy the unions and school districts.



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Many other for-profit education companies have realized that the key to growth is to satisfy students and their parents rather than the bureaucrats who can sign large government contracts. According to a January report by the Commercialism in Education Research Unit at Arizona State University, there were 36 for-profit education management companies in the U.S. in 2001, operating 370 schools in 24 states. An overwhelming majority of those schools are public charter schools, which receive their funding only after attracting students to enroll in their schools. These companies have managed to grow their businesses incrementally, hoping for a small profit at each school.

Only when the funding truly follows a child will we have a market in education that is responsive to the right customers: the students and their parents. To the extent that Edison has failed that test, the company has also failed public education.

Private space voyages

The Race to Sell the Moon

Jesse Walker

AFTER YEARS OF inattention, the moon will soon be deluged with mechanical visitors from Earth. Both Europe and Japan intend to send spacecraft to our largest natural satellite next year, and China is rumored to be preparing a moonshot as well. And in June 2003 a California company, TransOrbital, intends to launch the first private mission to the moon.

TransOrbital plans to send an unmanned probe, dubbed the Trailblazer, from the Baikonur Cosmodrome, a former Soviet launch site in Kazakhstan and the world's oldest spacepad. It took two years for the company to win the U.S. government's approval for its project, but the dream of exploring space without working for the feds goes back long before that, from serious efforts to raise capital to quixotic projects like the Association of Autonomous Astronauts, a tongue-in-cheek effort in the '90s to create "a worldwide network of community-based groups dedicated to building their own spaceships" by the year 2000. TransOrbital may be the first private enterprise to get through the hoop, but it isn't the only one in the running: The Virginia-based LunaCorp, for example, hopes to put a craft into lunar orbit next year as well.

How do you finance a company that explores the moon?

In the past, futurist speculations have ranged from extraterrestrial mining to space tourism. TransOrbital and LunaCorp are setting their sights lower: They plan to photograph and videotape their voyages and to sell the results back on Earth. Among other uses, TransOrbital hopes to turn those photos into a more low-key form of space tourism: a video game that simulates a space journey for moon-dreaming couch potatoes.

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Wilting Greens

The World Summit on Sustainable Development disappointed environmentalists—and heartened the poor.

"It's clear that we've suffered a number of major defeats," declared Andrew Hewett, executive director of Oxfam Community Aid, at the conclusion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in September. Greenpeace climate director Steve Sawyer complained, "What we've come up with is absolute zero, absolutely nothing." The head of an alliance of European green groups proclaimed, "We barely kept our heads above water."

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Environmental activists hoped the summit would set the international agenda for sweeping environmental reform over the next 15 years. Indeed, they hoped to do nothing less than revolutionize how the world's economy operates. Such fundamental change was necessary, said the summiteers, because a profligate humanity consumes too much, breeds too much, and pollutes too much, setting the stage for a global ecological catastrophe.

But the greens' disappointment was inevitable because their major goals—preserving the environment, eradicating poverty, and limiting economic growth—are incompatible. Economic growth is a prerequisite for lessening poverty, and it's also the best way to improve the environment. Poor people cannot afford to worry much about improving outdoor air quality, let alone afford to pay for it. Rather than face that reality, environmentalists increasingly invoke "sustainable development." The most common definition of the phrase comes from the 1987 United Nations report *Our Common Future*: development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

For radical greens, sustainable development means economic stagnation. The Earth Island Institute's Gar Smith told Cybercast News, "I have seen villages in Africa...that were disrupted and destroyed by the introduction of electricity." Apparently, the natives no longer sang community songs or sewed together in the evenings. "I don't think a lot of electricity is a good thing," Smith added. "It is the fuel that powers a lot of multinational imagery." He doesn't want poor Africans and Asians "corrupted" by ads for Toyota and McDonald's, or by Jackie Chan movies.

Indian environmentalist Sunita Narain decried the "pernicious introduction of the flush toilet" during a recent PBS/BBC television debate hosted by Bill Moyers. Luckily, most other summiteers disagreed with Narain's curious disdain for sanitation. One of the few firm goals set at the confab was that adequate sanitation should be supplied by 2015 to half of the 2.2 billion people now lacking it.

Sustainable development boils down to the old-fashioned "limits to growth" model popularized in the 1970s. Hence Daniel Mittler of Friends of the Earth International moaned that "the summit failed to set the necessary economic and ecological limits to globalization." The *Jo'burg Memo*, issued by the radical green Heinrich Böll Foundation before the summit, summed it up this way: "Poverty alleviation cannot be separated from wealth alleviation."

The greens are right about one thing: The extent of global poverty is stark. Some 1.1 billion people lack safe drinking water, 2.2 billion are without adequate sanitation, 2.5 billion have no access to modern energy services, 11 million children under the age of 5 die each year in developing countries from preventable diseases, and 800 million people are still malnourished, despite a global abundance of food. Poverty

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eradication is clearly crucial to preventing environmental degradation, too, since there is nothing more environmentally destructive than a hungry human.

Most summit participants from the developing world understood this. They may be egalitarian, but unlike their Western counterparts they do not aim to make everyone equally poor. Instead, they want the good things that people living in industrialized societies enjoy.

That explains why the largest demonstration during the summit, consisting of more than 10,000 poor and landless people, featured virtually no banners or chants about conventional environmentalist issues such as climate change, population control, renewable resources, or biodiversity. Instead, the issues were land reform, job creation, and privatization.

The anti-globalization stance of rich activists widens this rift. Environmentalists claim trade harms the environment and further impoverishes people in the developing world. They were outraged by the dominance of trade issues at the summit.

"The leaders of the world have proved that they work as employees for the transnational corporations," asserted Friends of the Earth Chairman Ricardo Navarro. Indian ecofeminist Vandana Shiva added, "This summit has become a trade summit, it has become a trade show." Yet the U.N.'s own data underscore how trade helps the developing world. As fact sheets issued by the U.N. put it, "During the 1990s the economies of developing countries that were integrated into the world economy grew more than twice as fast as the rich countries. The 'non-globalizers' grew only half as fast and continue to lag further behind."

By invoking a zero sum version of sustainable development, environmentalists not only put themselves at odds with the developing world; they ignore the way in which economic growth helps protect the environment. The real commons from which we all draw is the growing pool of scientific, technological, and institutional concepts, and the capital they create. Past generations have left us far more than they took, and the result has been an explosion in human well-being, longer life spans, less disease, more and cheaper food, and expanding political freedom.

Such progress is accompanied by environmental improvement. Wealthier is healthier for both people and the environment. As societies become richer and more technologically adept, their air and water become cleaner, they set aside more land for nature, their forests expand, they use less land for agriculture, and more people cherish wild species. All indications suggest that the 21st century will be the century of ecological restoration, as humanity uses physical resources ever more efficiently, disturbing the natural world less and less.

In their quest to impose a reactionary vision of sustainable development, the disappointed global greens will turn next to the World Trade Organization, the body that oversees international trade rules. During the summit, the WTO emerged as the greens' bête noire. As Friends of the Earth International's Daniel Mittler carped, "Instead of using the [summit] to respond to global concerns over deregulation and liberalization, governments are pushing the World Trade Organization's agenda." "See you in Cancun!" promised Greenpeace's Steve Sawyer, referring to the location of the next WTO ministerial meeting in September 2003. That confab will build on the WTO's Doha Trade Round, launched last year, which is aimed at reducing the barriers to trade for the world's least developed countries.

The WTO may achieve worthy goals that eluded the Johannesburg summit, such as eliminating economically and ecologically ruinous farm and energy subsidies and opening developed country markets to the products of developing nations. Free marketeers and greens might even form an alliance on those issues.

But environmentalists want to use the WTO to implement their sustainable development agenda: global renewable energy targets, regulation based on the precautionary principle, a "sustainable consumption and production project," a worldwide ecolabeling scheme. According to Greenpeace's Sawyer, nearly everyone at the Johannesburg summit agreed "there is something wrong with unbridled neoliberal capitalism."

Let's hope the greens fail at the WTO just as they did at the U.N. summit. Their sustainable development agenda, supposedly aimed at improving environmental health, instead will harm the natural world, along with the economic prospects of the world's poorest people. The conflicting goals on display at the summit show that at least some of the world's poor are wise to that fact. ▮

Ronald Bailey (rbailey@reason.com) is **reason***'s science correspondent and the editor of Global Warming and Other Eco-Myths: How the Environmental Movement Uses False Science to Scare Us to Death (Prima Publishing).*

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Ecumenical Intolerance

The sin of extremism is neither common to all Muslims nor limited to Islam.

PRESIDENT BUSH HAS stressed repeatedly that America's war on terrorism is not a war on Islam, which, he asserts, is a "religion of peace" perverted by fanatical extremists. But from the start dissenting voices have said that Islam itself poses a threat to Western civilization and that its inherently violent and oppressive nature was being whitewashed for the sake of political correctness.

One of the first salvos was fired by the Rev. Franklin Graham, who in October 2001 called Islam "a very evil and wicked religion." (He later insisted he was denouncing Islamic extremism, not all Muslims.) More recently, the Rev. Jerry Falwell told *60 Minutes* that Islam's founder, Mohammed, was a "terrorist." Curiously, in this debate the defense of Islam is usually the province of secularist liberals, while the harshest criticism comes from religious ultraconservatives whose views sometimes overlap with those of Islamic fundamentalists.

In fact, the question "Is Islam a religion of peace or a religion of violence?" is virtually meaningless. Like any major faith, Islam has many faces.

The religion's critics argue that the Koran itself provides the foundation for bigotry and aggression toward non-Muslims, pointing to Mohammed's bloody wars against infidels. "In my opinion," Falwell told *60 Minutes*, "Jesus set the example for love, as did Moses, and I think that Mohammed set an opposite example."

Yet as the religious scholar Alex Kronemer has pointed out, Mohammed was no bloodier a figure than Moses—and the Bible contains plenty of language no less violent than the Koran's. At one point, Moses takes the Israelites to task for sparing the women and children of a vanquished enemy tribe and instructs them to kill all the male children and all the women, except for virgins, who can be taken as slaves and concubines. Mosaic law also makes idolatry or the worship of other gods a capital offense, along with a host of other crimes, including adultery, cursing one's parents, and sodomy.

In his new book *The Name*, Graham writes, "Islam—unlike Christianity—has among its basic teachings a deep intolerance for those who follow other faiths." Yet the basic Christian teaching that salvation can be found only through Jesus Christ can surely be seen as a foundation for intolerance. Throughout history, people professing to follow Christ have killed, tortured, and persecuted countless men and women (most of them also Christians) in the sincere belief that they were not only protecting good Christians from the danger of being seduced by heresy but saving their victims' souls from eternal damnation.

While witch hunts and the persecution of heretics are generally associated with the Catholic Church, Protestantism does not have a stellar historical record either. Early Protestant leaders urged rulers to root out Catholicism in their domains, just as the popes urged Catholic princes to suppress Protestantism. In Calvin's 16th-century Geneva, even private practice of Catholic rites was punishable by expulsion from the city, attendance at sermons was mandatory, and the theological dissident Michael Servetus was burned at the stake for rejecting the doctrines of the Trinity and infant baptism.

Christian history is also marred by often brutal persecution of the Jews, including forced conversions. Indeed, it is a little-disputed fact that in the Middle Ages, Jews in Islamic countries, while relegated to second-class status, enjoyed far more toleration than in most

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of Christendom. Virulent anti-Jewish bigotry can be found in the writings of major Christian figures. Luther's 1543 polemic *The Jews and Their Lies* urged Christian princes to rid their lands of the "abominable blasphemy" spread by Jews and "act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone, and marrow." His advice included "to set fire to their synagogues," to destroy Jewish homes, to confiscate "all their prayer books and Talmudic writings," and to forbid rabbis to teach "on pain of loss of life and limb."

One legitimate counterpoint is that during the last 500 years mainstream Christianity has evolved to embrace tolerance and religious freedom. Lutheran churches, for instance, have formally repudiated Luther's anti-Semitic writings, whereas equally repellent anti-Jewish rhetoric is standard fare in much of the Arab press today.

But it is far from certain that this evolution was due to something inherent in Christian teachings rather than to other circumstances. While the split caused by the Reformation initially led to bloody religious wars, it was eventually recognized that some degree of tolerance was necessary to preserve civil peace. The secular ideals that arose from the Enlightenment also played a major role.

Meanwhile, church authorities often actively resisted religious liberty. The idea that individuals have the right to practice and preach whatever religion—let alone irreligion—they choose was denounced as dangerous lunacy by a succession of popes throughout the 19th century and well into the 20th. In 1953 Pope Pius XII stated that "error and false religions cannot be the object of a natural right." This stance did not change until 1965, with the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI's decree *Dignitatis Humanae*.

In an October 2001 essay in *The New York Times Magazine*, Andrew Sullivan, himself a Catholic, wrote, "It seems almost as if there is something inherent in religious monotheism that lends itself to...terrorist temptation. If you believe that there is an eternal afterlife and that endless indescribable torture awaits those who disobey God's law, then it requires no huge stretch of imagination to make sure that you not only conform to each diktat but that you also encourage and, if necessary, coerce others to do the same."

Every belief system that lays claim to the One Truth holds the seeds of violent intolerance.

Not that religion should be singled out as *the* source of intolerance: The worst acts of individual or state-sponsored terrorism during the last 100 years were driven by aggressively secular ideologies that promised an earthly paradise. It's more accurate to say that every belief system that lays claim to the One Truth carries within it the seeds of violent intolerance.

Searching the texts of various faiths to discover which is the most inherently bellicose may be an interesting exercise, but what's relevant is whether there is something in Islamic culture today that encourages the spread of violent fanaticism. Some scholars who reject attempts to demonize Islam itself nonetheless agree that Al Qaeda–style terrorism is not a fringe phenomenon but a reflection of a dangerous and pervasive brand of Islamic extremism. Why this extremism has emerged is a complicated question that includes a mix of historical, social, economic, and religious factors.

The inescapable fact is that in many places around the globe Islam has been backsliding toward more rigid and intolerant orthodoxy, culminating in the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Yet the same hatred of secularism and modernity that animates Muslim radicals, in a more moderate form, has also driven the rise of Christian religious fundamentalism in the West.

This is not to say that Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell would send young men to blow themselves up in discos or fly airplanes into buildings, or that the Southern Baptist Convention, which passed a resolution a few years ago urging wives to "submit graciously" to their husbands, wants to impose Talibanesque restrictions on women. But in their railings against sexual freedom, women's liberation, pornography, godlessness, and other purported evils of modernity, the two groups do mirror each other eerily.

After September 11, Falwell famously declared that "the pagans, and the abortionists, and the feminists, and the gays and lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, People for the American Way—all of them who have tried to secularize America" had helped cause the attacks. The terrorists who actually carried them out might agree. ■

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Foreign Intrigue

What explains the presidential urge to go global?

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES make many promises they don't intend to keep. The most frequent one is that they will resist the siren song of foreign adventure and focus on pocketbook issues. The image of a president reluctantly trying to avoid foreign policy thickets but eventually devoting more attention to international matters than to domestic well-being is so familiar that the motifs of American diplomacy may be less Teddy Roosevelt's "speak softly and carry a big stick" than Michael Corleone's "Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!"

Every president in recent memory has come into office vowing to commit foreign policy only when absolutely necessary; every one has ended up making statecraft the centerpiece of his administration. Elected on that most domestic of rhetorical questions—"Are you better off now than you were four years ago?"—Ronald Reagan burnished his legend by cold-cocking communism and liberating Grenada's oppressed masses. George H.W. Bush came into office as the Education President but spent his tenure battling former clients Saddam Hussein and Manuel "Pineapple Face" Noriega. Capitalizing on Bush's homeland neglect, Bill Clinton gave us the phrase "It's the economy, stupid," then absurdly seemed to believe he would be remembered for peace breakthroughs in the Middle East, Northern Ireland, and the Balkans.

George W. Bush is a kind of summation of this trend. His campaign promised a "humble" foreign policy, and a large minority of voters deemed him fit for office despite—more likely, because of—his indifference to foreign affairs, famously signaled by an inability to name several heads of state. Yet apart from an early tax cut, he has done little beside foreign policy. He at least has a compelling reason for his foreign policy focus—though his plans, as of this writing, to prosecute a war on radical Islam by overthrowing the most secular governments in the Middle East are questionable at the very least.

The temptation to lose oneself in diplomacy can't be explained by electoral calculations. Foreign policy has been conspicuously absent from voters' decision making for many years. Victory in the Persian Gulf didn't win Bush I a second term, nor did failure in Vietnam cost Richard Nixon the White House. Jimmy Carter produced fiascos in Iran and the controversial completion of the Panama Canal treaty, but he was done in by stagflation and the national malaise.

Lyndon Johnson's was the one recent presidency arguably wrecked by foreign events; but even there the actual war in Vietnam was less important than its stateside fallout, which overtook Johnson's domestic wars on poverty and abdominal scar tissue. With the raucous resistance to the war adding to the impression of a nation out of control, Nixon was elected more on the strength of his low-and-order candidacy than on his secret plan to end the conflict.

Nor can it be that foreign policy successes are easy to rack up. Even apparent triumphs in the Persian Gulf War and Afghanistan—not to mention countless doomed peace initiatives between the Israelis and the Palestinians—look less successful as time passes. As important, foreign policy usually occurs in a vacuum of public attention; its concepts and phrases—*nation building, debate, peace process*—are remote and ephemeral as Imelda Marcos' shoes.

So why does statecraft prove so alluring? Probably for all the reasons given above. Unlike, say, tax policy or crime prevention, foreign policy is one area where not knowing what you're doing is no barrier to entry. An amnesiac public assures that it's also largely a consequence-free game (quick: who's the current leader of Yugoslavia? Croatia? Bosnia-Herzegovina?). You can look presidential, secure in the knowledge that even your gravest errors will go unnoticed at home by all but the most committed policy wonks.

Unless, of course, your diplomatic and intelligence failures allow attacks on New York and Washington that kill more than 3,000 people. In that case, you can always blame your predecessor or successor—whichever is more convenient. ◻

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"JUNKIE LOGIC"
FEATURING "JOHN Q PUBLIC"
?!?
HOW DID THIS CIGARETTE GET IN MY MOUTH?
PETERBAGGE@EARTHLINK.NET
I'M GLAD THEY RAISED TAXES ON CIGARETTES!
THAT WILL ENCOURAGE ME TO QUIT!
IGARETTES NOW $7.50 PER PACK
DRAT! I STILL CAN'T QUIT...
AND I'M GOING BROKE!
I'M GONNA SIGN ON WITH THIS CLASS ACTION LAWSUIT AGAINST "BIG TOBACCO"...
IF I CAN'T QUIT I SHOULD AT LEAST GET SOME OF MY MONEY BACK!
YAY! WE WON!
NOW I CAN AFFORD MY SMOKES!
NEWS
JURY AWARDS PLAINTIFFS $3 TRILLION IN TOBACCO LAWSUIT
WE'RE RICH!" EXCLAIM LAWYERS
THE PRICE WENT UP AGAIN?
THE ONLY WAY I CAN QUIT NOW IS IF THEY OUTLAW CIGARETTES ENTIRELY!
GARETTES NOW $15 PER PACK
I'M GLAD TOBACCO IS ILLEGAL NOW!
ONLY IF I DON'T GET MY HANDS ON SOME SMOKES SOON I'M GONNA KILL SOMEONE!
NEWS
TOBACCO DECLARED ILLEGAL
MANDATORY JAIL TIME! HUGE FINE! SOUGHT BY CONGRESS
THESE SMUGGLERS ARE ROBBING ME BLIND, BUT WHAT CHOICE DO I HAVE?
I'M A HOPELESS ADDICT!
MY SETTLEMENT MONEY IS LONG GONE...
THE ONLY WAY I CAN SUPPORT MY HABIT IS BY RESORTING TO CRIME!
SMASH!
WOOP WOOP WOOP
I'M NOT A CRIMINAL! I'm A VICTIM!
I NEED MEDICAL CARE!
PO
ADDICTION IS A DISEASE, NOT A CRIME...
I SENTENCE THIS MAN TO A REHABILITATION PROGRAM...
THANK YOU, YOUR HONOR...
AHH, NOTHING SATISFIES LIKE A STATE-SPONSORED CIGARETTE...
NOT TO MENTION FREE ROOM AND BOARD!
END.

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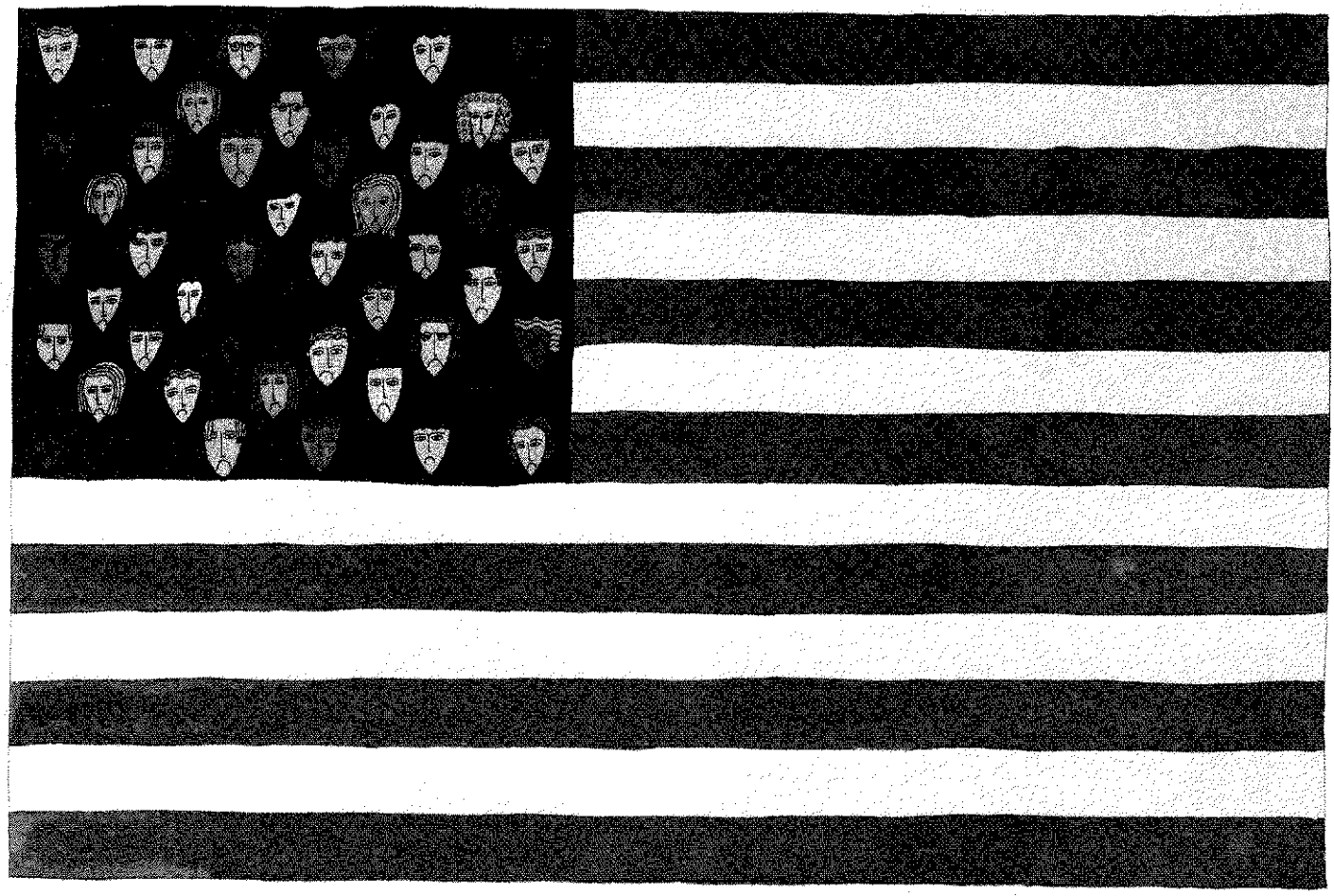

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E Pluribus Umbrage

The long, happy life of America's anti-defamation industry

Tim Cavanaugh

THE SEXUAL ABUSE scandal of 2002 is arguably the gravest crisis in the history of the American Catholic Church. Sexual dysfunction, hypocrisy, institutional self-regard, Soviet-style secrecy, pathological hostility to plain dealing—even the infamous 19th-century nativist fable *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* couldn't support so many anti-Catholic stereotypes.

In the midst of this emergency, the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, the nation's most prominent Catholic advocacy organization, alerted its 300,000 members to a grave threat to the faith: a *King of the Hill* episode in which cartoon housewife Peggy Hill impersonates a nun. Even for the perpetually outraged Catholic League, this was minor stuff. But it's the kind of distorted controversy found in a strange and often lucrative segment of the political economy.

Call it the anti-defamation industry, the anti-discrimination lobby, or maybe the umbrage market. From politically connected lobbying behemoths to one-man shoestring operations using a Kinko's fax machine, the United States hosts a Mad Monster Party of advocacy groups dedicated to rebutting every real and imagined racial or ethnic slur. It's a field that attracts the talented and the warped, passionate crusaders and transparent self-promoters. It creates media stars and villains.

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And if the nit-picking interest group has become a cliché, anti-discrimination's capacity for driving legal and legislative agendas is no joke. Pandering to imagined Hibernian hypersensitivities has already resulted in the construction of an Irish Hunger Memorial on prime real estate in New York City's Battery Park and a gratuitous curriculum requirement that Empire State public schools teach the Irish famine as an attempted genocide by the British government. The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of B'nai B'rith boasts that its model hate crimes legislation has inspired actual laws in Wisconsin and elsewhere. One of President Bush's first initiatives after the September 11 attacks was to get a series of photo ops with representatives of Arab and Muslim anti-discrimination groups.

It's hard to place a valuation on the anti-discrimination industry. The 89-year-old Anti-Defamation League is the trailblazer, with an annual take of more than $40 million and a $400,000 salary for storied director Abraham Foxman. The National Council of La Raza rakes in a cool $16 million per year, a combination of government grants, public support, and other revenues. The Polish American Congress pulls down more than $5 million—despite its leader's habit of making wildly impolitic public statements (more on this later). The venerable Sons of Italy runs a nearly $200,000 Commission for Social Justice.

Tactics pioneered by the Anti-Defamation League are used by anti-discrimination groups that butt heads with the ADL itself. The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee budgets "in the area of a million dollars," according to an official, as does James Zogby's Arab American Institute. The Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) describes its budget as between $2 million and $4 million. The Rev. Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition famously declines to disclose its finances at all.

All Against All

The number of unincorporated one- or two-person social justice advocacy operations out there is beyond count. If you've noticed an absence of "No Latvians Need Apply" notices at local businesses, you can thank either the Latvian Truth Fund, which defends "the legal and civil rights of persons born in Latvia or of Latvian descent," or the American Latvian Association, which "defends the interests of Latvian Americans." There are Indian-American groups combating misrepresentations of Ganesha, Italian-American committees who condemn *Mickey Blue Eyes*, and Irish organizations bent on eliminating Barry Fitzgerald-style stereotypes.

Funny though they may be, such groups turn honest (or dishonest) differences into pseudo-crusades and portray an America that, contrary to abundant evidence, has made no progress against the bigotries of the past. "These groups serve a vital function," says Robert Alan Goldberg, a University of Utah history professor and author of *Enemies Within*, a study of conspiracy theories in America, "but somebody has to sound the fire bell when they pour gasoline on the fire and get into thrust and counterthrust with other groups."

Virtually all anti-discriminationists describe themselves as opponents of bigotry in all its forms. But despite some areas of agreement, such as support for "hate crimes" legislation, the anti-discrimination industry is the Hobbesian nightmare in a nonprofit setting. Arab and Muslim groups struggle with the ADL for mind share in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Serbian Orthodox Church combats not only anti-Serb stereotypes in the entertainment industry but also the Hague War Crimes Tribunal and the de facto pro-Croat teachings of Our Lady of Medjugorje. The Polish American Congress alienates the Jewish community in Chicago. Italian Americans battle American Indians every Columbus Day.

Advocacy groups also come into conflict with people they putatively represent. The Anti-Defamation League is frequently criticized by liberal Jews. A recent *Sports Illustrated* poll suggested most Native Americans tolerate or even support the Indian team nicknames advocacy groups have fought for many years. William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, battles his own church's liberals. Many or most Italian Americans regard Mafia films as, at worst, too abstracted from reality to cause much alarm.

Nevertheless, institutional logic demands eternal vigilance. "Simply said, there are careers, status, jobs and influence to be had as long as racism exists," writes Laird Wilcox in his 1998 book *The Watchdogs*, which details incidents of strong-arm tactics by anti-discrimination groups. An anti-discrimination group has little motive to report improvement, or even stasis, in cultural relations, because that would lessen the perceived need for the group.

Nor is there incentive to declare victory and go home, even when victory clearly has been won. The Polish American Congress is still operating decades after Mike Stivic endured his last Polish joke on *All in the Family*. Both the ADL and the Simon Wiesenthal Center are famous for fund raising letters warning of what the ADL calls "a rising tide of anti-Semitism here and around the world" and the Wiesenthal Center describes as "a frightening new wave of antisemitism and extremism—often mixed with Holocaust denial." The Catholic League's Donohue defines anti-

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Pop culture Goliaths such as Alka-Seltzer's "Mamma mia, datsa somma spicy meat-a-balls" slogan and Macy's "Godfather Game" fell to the wrath of Joe Colombo's Italian-American Civil Rights League.

Catholicism as the "anti-Semitism of the elites" and asserts "there is a contempt for Christianity among our elites in this country that has no rival."

If this perpetually rising tide is troubling, it's useful in forming cultural identity, particularly where such identity is fading or never existed in the first place. Asian Americans of all backgrounds now attach themselves to the World War II–era internment of Japanese Americans. Large numbers of Irish Americans dwell on the relatively mild bigotry their ancestors endured two presidents and countless CEOs ago. "It's easy to pick on the Irish, since we're easily dismissed as a minority or ethnic grouping of no particular significance," writes the *Richmond Times Dispatch*'s Tom Mullen. "You can say what you like about the Irish—especially Irish Catholics—but woe be unto you if you say anything critical about African-Americans or gays or any other group that has suffered from any kind of bigotry."

Even if we concede that historical suffering of a group confers political coherence on that group's descendants, few anti-discrimination groups have the serious historical roots of, say, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or the American Indian Movement. Self-described ethnic groups whose experience of America has been almost entirely positive can get into the act. *Don't talk to me about slavery; my ancestors were traumatized by* The Katzenjammer Kids! This may explain why anti-discrimination is a growth industry even—or especially—while identity politics fades into history, more Americans decline to identify themselves by ethnicity, and actual discrimination is, by virtually all measures, at historically low levels.

Toilet Trouble

"We are not humorless," says Ajay Shah. "There are things that are clearly humorous, and you have to be willing to take a joke." Shah, convener of American Hindus Against Defamation (AHAD), is speaking of Apu, the Indian Quik-E-Mart owner on *The Simpsons*. Shah occasionally has been called upon to object to this characterization of a penny-pinching subcontinental; he sees Apu as a creation more of affection than calumny. "I get two or three incidents reported every month," he says. "You have to make a judgment whether it's worth pursuing or just trivial."

In the anti-discrimination economy, AHAD is a penny stock, with no paid staff, office, or telephone. AHAD convenes on a case-by-case basis. Its targets have included an Aerosmith album cover depicting a disfigured Krishna, Sanskrit shlokas in an orgy scene in the movie *Eyes Wide Shut*, and, most famously, a Seattle design shop selling toilet covers with pictures of Ganesha and Kali. In all these cases, AHAD's strategy of engagement with offenders, backed up by e-mail campaigns and the hint of boycotts, resulted in removal of the offending images.

"In all of our protests we have never asked for monetary compensation," says Shah, "because if we can educate people, we'll become a major organization whom they'll come to before they start a project."

AHAD has come under fire from both left and right. In a screed for the Indian Web site Rediff.com, writer Varsha Bhosle attacks Shah's "ingrained Hindu obsequiousness," which allowed the Seattle designer to escape "without a scratch." In Bhosle's view, AHAD is a lily-livered Gandhian group that deserves "a nice Islamic-style whipping."

Liberals, on the other hand, condemn AHAD's affiliations with both the million-dollar advocacy outfit Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America, which has ties to India's ruling BJP party, and the nationalist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, whose mission includes "strengthening the [Hindu] society by emphasizing and inculcating a spirit of unity, so that no one can dare challenge it." Both groups supported the demolition of the Ayodha mosque and say attacks on Christian missionaries result from "anger of patriotic Hindu youth against anti-national forces."

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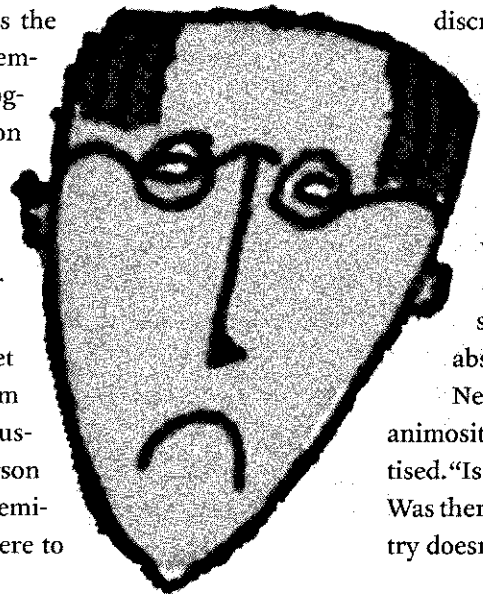
"The issues we pick have no political overtones," counters Shah. "We take up issues offensive to Hindus...once people denigrate your symbols, it's a matter of time before they say, 'If people worship these symbols, they're worth ridiculing.'" Shah notes that his group participates in pluralism efforts and meets with the Council on American-Islamic Relations. "Hindus are very liberal," he says. "We see nothing wrong with people choosing their own lifestyles. If there is a libertarian religion, it's Hinduism."

Upping the Anti

This easygoing spirit is a rarity among anti-discrimination groups. "The issue," Wilcox writes in *The Watchdogs*, "is the abominable record...with respect to individual rights...misrepresentations and lies, exploitation of normal human sympathy for the underdog, flagrant double standards, hidden agendas, unprincipled methods, and unconscionable use of law enforcement to advance their own ends."

Not surprisingly, the 9/11 attacks pushed these tendencies to the forefront while giving urgency to anti-discrimination efforts. CAIR tallies anti-Muslim incidents, which it says tripled in the last year. The group issues news alerts with headlines that are witty ("Ann Coulter Attacks, Dates Muslims"), breathless ("House Leader Calls for Ethnic Cleansing of Palestinians"), or mendacious ("First Lady Says She Can't Empathize With Palestinian Mothers").

The post-9/11 backlash, the Afghan war, endless intifadas, and the Bush administration's hysterical terrorist threat warnings have inspired an unbroken string of columns, speeches, and television appearances from CAIR, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), and the Arab American Institute (AAI). The rising profile of these groups never goes unchallenged. The ADL's Foxman, who accuses the AAI's Zogby of "crude anti-Semitism," campaigned to get Zogby's son ousted from a position in the Clinton State Department. Leaders of other Arab and Muslim groups have been subject to similar attacks.



"They're saying don't let me on television because I'm bad," says ADC spokesman Hussein Ibish. "Pipes and Emerson rehash a version of anti-Semitism: 'There is a plot out there to destroy our Christian way of life; they may look like us, but they worship a hostile and alien god.' This is *political* anti-Semitism, recast against another Semitic group to exclude that group from the political process."

Ibish is referring to Middle East expert Daniel Pipes, head of the Middle East Forum, and Steven Emerson, self-dramatizing MSNBC terrorism expert. The dustup between Pipes and his Saracen adversaries is one of the oddest offshoots of the war on terrorism. Pipes has condemned CAIR as "'moderate' friends of terror." AAI founder Zogby has been the subject of a rant in Pipes' *Middle East Quarterly*. Ibish, Pipes writes, is "Anti-American, anti-Semitic, inaccurate and immoral."

Pipes' Web site carries exposés about CAIR. CAIR shoots back with a special "Who Is Daniel Pipes?" feature on its own site. Like all pissing contests, it ends with everybody getting wet. Pipes mass e-mails alerts about his run-ins with various interlocutors ("Pipes on 'Hardball'—hits one back to the pitcher," "Pipes on O'Reilly Factor, dukes it out with host," "Pipes vs. Zakaria on MSNBC's 'Hardball'"). His enemies are even more energetic. Here is how Mohammed Alo, a young writer at toledomuslims.com, describes a Pipes appearance on the defunct talk show *Politically Incorrect*:

"Host Bill Maher and the other guests quickly argued that Pipes is the one that needs to be controlled and kept out of the public stage. Even they noticed his outright hatred and anti-Muslim sentiments. You could faintly hear an audience member shout out 'Pipe down Pipes!'

"Pipes was humiliated. His plans were foiled once again. Bigotry was on display, but failed to reign supreme. Hooray for America. Pipes will forever remain in the garbage bin of history, and rightfully so."

Needless to say, very little of this has to do with fighting discrimination. "We're a civil rights organization, but much of what we do is devoted to foreign policy," says Ibish. "Much of the discrimination Arab Americans face stems from disagreements between Arab Americans and the rest of society over our policies toward the Middle East. Until we can create a more reasonable foreign policy, we'll face defamation in the form of films, television, discrimination in the workplace...I believe this absolutely."

Nevertheless, Arab-American leaders concede that animosity toward their ethnicity may be less than advertised. "Is there a generalized antagonism?" says Zogby. "No. Was there a problem immediately after 9/11? Yes...the country doesn't have much tolerance for hearing Arabs whine.

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It doesn't take a Catholic basher to be struck by the fact that a church uniquely confident in its opposition to stem cell research, condom use, and war in Iraq is somehow unable to take a strong stand against raping children.

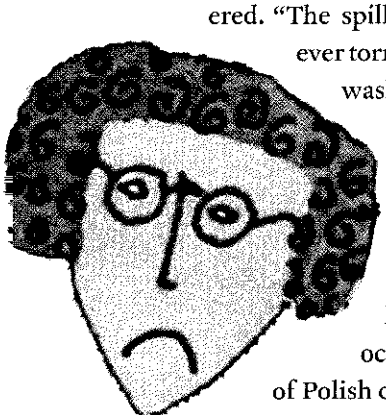
There are people who try to make politics out of whining. I choose not to be a professional victim, because I don't think it's true and because people don't have much tolerance for it."

Victimization politics also holds tactical disadvantages. Anti-Semitism remains a concept with much more punch than such recently diagnosed maladies as "Anti-Arabism" or "Islamophobia." Reference to the Holocaust is still sufficient to shout down any discussion about the plight of Arab Americans. "I don't think anything in the Arab experience can resonate similarly, because I don't think anything in the Arab experience *is* similar," admits Ibish. "But since we can't counter that emotional appeal honestly, we can question its relevance to the Arab-Israeli conflict."

Big Trouble in Little Poland

For an odder case of emotional appeal turned into political ordnance, consider the City of Big Shoulders, where the slow-motion implosion of the Polish American Congress (PAC) mirrors the political decline of Chicago's Polish community.

Since 1996 PAC President Edward Moskal has been making statements that can charitably be called ill-considered. "The spilled blood of those Jews, however torrential it may have been, cannot wash away the blood of their Christian neighbors," Moskal wrote in a 1996 article that defended a commemorative cross at Auschwitz. (Elsewhere in the piece, he averred that Jews collaborated with Poland's Soviet occupiers.) He dismisses evidence of Polish collaboration with the Germans as "twisted history," an assault on Polish sovereignty. Moskal ridicules attempts by Poland's leadership to offer restitution to Jews and implies Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, generally considered a resistance hero, was a Nazi collaborator.



Moskal's impatience with talk of Polish guilt is partly understandable. "[Poles] see themselves as victims, which they were," says Guy Billauer, director of the National Polish-American-Jewish-American Council, which broke with PAC in 1996. "They have a right to think that way. But [the Moskal controversy] has opened our eyes. We believe it's hard to reform somebody who holds these views. It's like mending fences with Arafat."

"I think people should welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues with somebody who speaks his mind," counters PAC spokesman T. Ron Jasinski-Herbert, "rather than saying the right things and thinking all the bullshit inside." Whatever Moskal's true feelings may be (he did not consent to an interview for this article), his comments have diminished both membership and clout for PAC, an umbrella group for 3,000 religious, fraternal, and political orders.

The situation came to a head during this year's Democratic primary in the 5th Congressional District, which pitted former state legislator Nancy Kaszak against combative Clinton administration apparatchik Rahm Emanuel. Because of demographic changes and redistricting in Chicago's 30th Ward, the Polish-American voting bloc is declining. "We do have a valid gripe," says Jasinski-Herbert. "If we lose this one we have no more Polish representatives from the largest Polish community outside Poland."

But it may not have helped when, a few weeks before the election, Moskal gave Kaszak a contribution and then denounced Emanuel as a "millionaire carpetbagger" with divided U.S.-Israeli loyalties, accusing Emanuel's Polish supporters of accepting "30 pieces of silver to betray Polonia." "The country from which Poles come struggled for democracy," Moskal said. "While the country...to which

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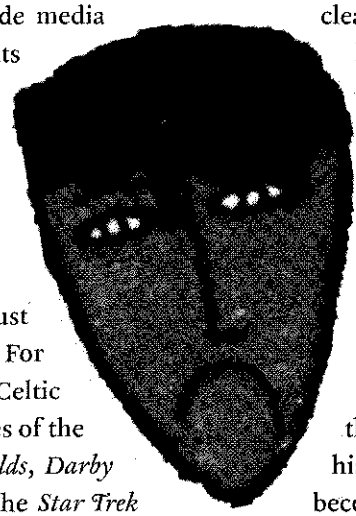
[Emanuel] gave his allegiance defiles the Polish homeland."

Kaszak publicly rejected Moskal's endorsement. Emanuel insisted that Kaszak go further and order Moskal to "cease and desist." The incident received wide media play, and in the weeks after Moskal's comments Emanuel closed an eight-point deficit in polls to win the primary. The loss of Polish-American political clout turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy.



Celtic Twilight

But what is ethnic cleansing or the Holocaust compared to the scourge of stage Irishmen? For Ultan O'Broin, founder of San Francisco's Celtic Tiger Anti-Defamation League, the great issues of the day include *Angela's Ashes, Fighting Fitzgeralds, Darby O'Gill and the Little People,* and presumably the *Star Trek* episode wherein Kirk beats the stuffing out of an arch-rival tellingly named Finnegan.

O'Broin, an Irishman working in Silicon Valley, publishes articles excoriating "Oirish" stereotypes and ridiculing the dumb Americans who fall for them. "In the last decade, the Republic of Ireland has undergone a sea change," he writes, noting that "Ireland has the highest per capita ownership of Mercedes-Benz automobiles in Europe." Yet "stereotyping continues in the United States." His proposed solution—one of them, anyway—is simple: "Americans (and Irish Americans) need to go to Ireland to see for themselves. They should protest the negative stereotyping. Then they might be more than welcome to celebrate what it really means to be Irish today."

The Celtic Tiger Anti-Defamation League (CTADL) claims to have attracted 150 members, and the group's proposals for anti-stereotype legislation have been given a sympathetic hearing by San Francisco's mayor and legislators. As with soccer and Islam, the CTADL's small base alone may qualify it as one of America's fastest-growing organizations.

But the politics of Hibernian equality are thorny, even among Hibernians. Consider the sad case of Francis Boyle, a law professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Boyle, described by legendary activist Philip Berrigan as "a lawyer of the quality of Thomas More or Gandhi...the most competent and impassioned advocate of international law in the U.S.," claims he experienced discrimination when he objected to the bar crawls graduate students hold every St. Patrick's Day. "A bar crawl 'in honor' of St. Patrick, the Patron Saint of Ireland, and one of the great figures of Western Judeo-Christian Civilization, is completely sacrilegious," he says.

Boyle's objections, he says, made him a target. "It's clearly a hostile work environment for me," he says. "I've been subject to ridicule by students and student organizations. This is a hostile environment based on my race—I'm of Irish nationality and a citizen of the Irish Republic—and on my religion—I'm Catholic."

Indeed, Boyle claims the harassment got so bad that he complained to the U.S. Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division, noting that "it doesn't cost me anything" to have the government investigate his claims. Yet when pressed for details, Boyle becomes as vague as Van Morrison lyrics. "I got nasty e-mails," the professor says, giving no hint of their contents. "They ridiculed me for being Catholic and ridiculed Catholicism. Two years ago, they even made a T-shirt ridiculing me." Was this ridicule based on religion or ethnicity, or do Boyle's students and colleagues just dislike him? Without examples, it's impossible to say.

It's also hard to see a legal case, given that "Irish" is nowhere recognized as a racial category. Sacrilege is an even tougher case, since nothing in Catholic canon law prohibits getting loaded on St. Patrick's Day. Boyle is having none of this. "My secretary, who has a high school education, and isn't even Catholic, understands this," he snaps, abruptly ending the interview.

Perhaps a professor who claims discrimination while offhandedly insulting his secretary is not the ideal client, but shouldn't Boyle and the Celtic Tigers be able to find common ground? Alas, the professor's claim to Irish citizenship is based on Ireland's notorious grandparent loophole—a practice to which the Tigers, who loathe Irish Americans, strongly object. "This citizen stuff is complete nonsense," says CTADL spokesman William O'Herlihy. "Why not grant American citizenship to anyone in Ireland who has an American grandchild?" Thus even apparent allies cannot escape the anxiety of small differences.

Bald Sopranos

The Irish are not the only long-assimilated European immigrant group that still has it tough. "I'm a lawyer, but my dad was a shoemaker," says Ted Grippo, the chatty and amiable founder of Chicago's American-Italian Defense

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One thing you can say for anti-discrimination groups: By their very existence, they negate the idea of America as a homogeneous, or even harmonious, society. This alone constitutes a public service.

Association (AIDA). "Since 1930, we've had over 800 Mafia-type movies. I can't tell you how many times I've been asked if I'm connected." Fed up, Grippo is taking aim at Tony Soprano and the gang at the Bada-Bing—who themselves comically raised the issue of defamation in a recent episode about Columbus Day protests organized by Native Americans.

Grippo's familiarity with HBO's hit series would surprise the show's most ardent fans. "In *The Sopranos*, there are two groups of Italians: the mob guys and the other people. Of that second group—Dr. Cusamano, the parish priest, the restaurant owner, the kids, the wife, Dr. Melfi—they're all a bunch of slobs. Compare that to when Carmela met the Jewish psychiatrist or the African priest. Both of them were noble people, full of conscientious advice." As Grippo describes the subtlest details of *Sopranos* plots, you suspect he may be a secret fan, but the show's ethnic dynamic trumps everything for him.

Last year, Grippo brought legal action against Time Warner, citing a clause in the Illinois constitution that condemns "communications that portray criminality, depravity or lack of virtue in...a person or group of persons by reference to religious, racial, ethnic, national or regional affiliation." While the suit was dismissed, AIDA attracted 160 members. Grippo expects to have 200 or 300 members "pretty quickly. We're edging toward a paid staff. Within the next year we'll have some permanent staff."

Italian-American anti-discrimination has a long pedigree and one great event: the rise of Joe Colombo's Italian-American Civil Rights League (IACRL). Colombo, who gave his name to the reputed "Colombo Crime Family," formed the group in 1970, after son Joe Jr. was charged with melting down $500,000 in U.S. coins for their silver content. Within a year the IACRL attracted 100,000 members, boasting a multimillion-dollar budget and a five-room office suite on Madison Avenue. Pop culture Goliaths such as Alka-Seltzer's "Mamma mia, datsa somma spicy meat-a-balls" slogan and Macy's "Godfather Game" fell to the group's wrath. New York Gov. Nelson Rockefeller and U.S. Attorney General John Mitchell attended a "Unity Day Rally" at Columbus Circle. Thanks to the IACRL, the terms *Mafia* and *Cosa Nostra* are never uttered in the film version of *The Godfather*. Colombo's vision grew to include an IACRL-run hospital and rehab center and Camp Unity, a 250-acre retreat for underprivileged kids. In early 1971 he attained that benchmark of Nixon-era success, an appearance on *The Dick Cavett Show*.

The dream ended just as quickly after Colombo was fatally shot at the second Unity Day Rally in 1971; the league did not outlive him. Mob fans speculate the assassination was ordered by either Colombo rival Joe Gallo or boss Carlo Gambino, who feared the league's potential for drawing attention to discreet Gambino activities.

Richard Capozzola, a retired Florida high school teacher who worked for the IACRL, disputes both theories. "In the two years I was with the League, I worked closely with Joe; I never saw any criminal actions or heard so much as a profanity," he says. "There is no other group that has a label pinned to its people...Michael Milken, Marc Rich, Allie Tannenbaum, Crazy Eddie Antar—those were all criminals. But if you want to get your backside kicked, write about them and call them the Kosher Nostra."

At his site ItalianInfo.net, Capozzola publishes a 3,000-word essay defending the legacy of Colombo and the IACRL (whose "accomplishments overshadowed what all national Italian American organizations had tried to do for over SIXTY YEARS"). He speculates that Colombo's assassination was ordered by the government as part of its long-term project to denigrate Italian Americans. "The assassination of Joe Colombo, in my view, was a capstone to the unjust and unethical treatment that Italian Americans are subject to in everyday life."

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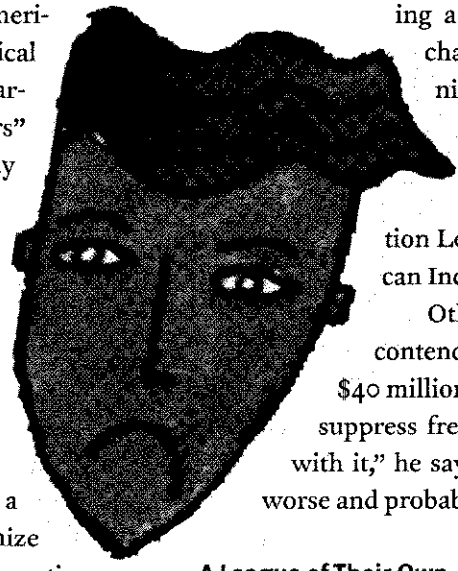
Capozzola still speaks out against "Uncle Tomassos" like Joe Pesci, Paul Sorvino, and *Sopranos* creator David Chase. "I love my country, but I sure don't love Hollywood," he says. His hope is that there might someday be an organization that weeds out anti-Italian slurs as assertively as the Anti-Defamation League obliterates anti-Semitism.

Hate for Sale

Anti-discrimination efforts do not occur in a vacuum. Even hypochondriacs get sick, and the anti-discrimination lobby exists in part because real discrimination exists. If the ADL's picture of an anti-Semitic Arab lobby is vivid, that's because pro-Arab sentiments frequently do slide into hoary anti-Jewish tropes, a fact the more honest Arab advocates, such as the ADC's Ibish, acknowledge.

To the surprise (if not disappointment) of Arab-American advocates, the post-9/11 backlash against Arabs and Muslims was more scattered and restrained than ubiquitous talk about internment camps and midnight roundups had led us to expect. But it would take a true Pollyanna to dismiss the troubles of Muslims in America when citizen and non-citizen alike are being deprived of such fancy Western niceties as the right to legal counsel.

Moreover, hate crime is often real crime. American Hindus Against Defamation is part of a political awakening that followed the murder of 30-year-old Navroze Mody by the Jersey City "Dotbusters" gang; agitation from the Indian community clearly helped push that case to a successful prosecution. (On the other hand, prominent civil rights advocate Helen Zia formed American Citizens for Justice after the murder at a strip club of 27-year-old Vincent Chin in 1982—a crime now widely described as a racially motivated killing, though the circumstances are murkier than advocates admit.)



But does a crime become worse because it's a hate crime? Are Americans too dumb to recognize bigotry unless a professional identifies it? Do anti-discrimination organizations actually make any difference?

Anti-discrimination groups are untroubled by such airy-fairy questions. Virtually all support broader federal hate crime laws. Ted Grippo's lawsuit against *The Sopranos* is amusing but not uncommon. Even the Celtic Tiger ADL, which seems at first like a Swiftian hoax, is dead serious about expansive hate crime laws.

"We would like to see local legislation or guidelines enacted to prevent negative stereotyping in the local media and at officially sanctioned events or by anyone in receipt of public contracts," says CTADL spokesman O'Herlihy. "If 24 Hour Fitness can draw the wrath of the oversized persons lobby...then I don't see why those that are offended by the negative stereotyping of *their* culture shouldn't be given serious thought too."

Nonlegislative strong-arming is even more common. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith pressures Internet service providers that don't police bulletin boards and libraries that display objectionable books. It once attempted to ban a textbook that "[leaned] over backward to provide a flattering portrait of Islamic civilization."

Laird Wilcox, a civil rights activist who fell out with ADL while researching fringe groups, devotes more than a quarter of *The Watchdogs* to ADL abuses. Among other things, he claims a documentary he worked on in the 1980s was faked by ADL staffers posing, with fake names and mustaches, as white supremacists.

The ADL's public record is daunting enough. In 1993 the group was fined for employing an off-duty San Francisco police officer to spy on other civil rights groups. Last year the ADL was fined nearly $10 million for defaming a Colorado couple with baseless charges of anti-Semitism. The organization defends its copyright on the word *anti-defamation*, taking action against groups such as the Anarchists Anti-Defamation League and Russell Means' American Indian Anti-Defamation Council.

Other civil rights groups, Wilcox contends, might behave similarly with a $40 million budget. "They're not hesitant to suppress free speech when they don't agree with it," he says, "but on the whole they're no worse and probably better than the ADL."

A League of Their Own

The endearing thing about Bill Donohue is that he genuinely seems to enjoy hurting people. The president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights peppers his press releases with blistering jabs at luminaries who stumble into anti-Catholic offense: "LARA FLYNN BOYLE ADMITS TO HER STUPIDITY...HEATHER GRAHAM'S SEXUAL HANG-UPS...Yo, Sly, ever think about getting out of the ring once and for all?" (The last is a reference to Sylvester Stallone's canceled series *Father Lefty.*)

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Anti-discrimination groups may in fact be most valuable when they are most combative, most obdurate, most willing to give up phony abstractions about equality for all and openly fight each other for crumbs of public attention.

Donohue specializes in invidious comparisons of the "If they said the same thing about blacks/Jews..." type. Some samples:

"Sadly, there is also a market for Jew-bashing cards. Millions of people hate gays. Ditto for Muslims. White racists abound. But there are no cards, thank God, that attack these groups. Just Catholics."

"If a group of white anti-black bigots dressed up as Al Jolson and mocked African Americans, no one would excuse them...."

"For starters, would [the Brooklyn Museum of Art] include a photograph of Jewish slave masters sodomizing their obsequious black slaves?"

In an interview for this story, Donohue is energetic, engaging, and unapologetic about his aggressive personal style. "We're not located in Kansas City," he says (a dig at the liberal *National Catholic Reporter*, which is headquartered there). "New York is a rough town. The people I debate are smart, quick, and tough. I'm not some pious little bluenose, backwoods kid."

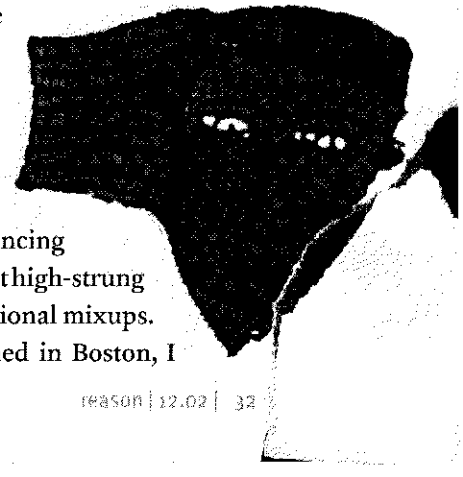
Invoking the image of sodomite Jewish slave masters is, in Donohue's view, fair play. "Why is that an invidious comparison?" he says. "Why isn't it *analogous*? I want a level playing field."

The Catholic League was formed in 1973 and turned over to Donohue's leadership 20 years later. Donohue's genius was to change the terms of the discussion, to present the Catholic League not as a socially conservative group but as the champion of an abused religious sect in a relentlessly bigoted environment. Everywhere the Catholic League looks—art museum, multiplex, TV set—an abyss of nearly Elizabethan Catholic bashing gazes back; the league fights back with press releases, letter writing campaigns, boycott threats, and an annual "Index of Anti-Catholicism."

This strategy invites a good deal of media mockery of the "wait 'til the Catholic League gets a load of this" variety. "When any other group complains, they're against discrimination," Donohue says. "When Bill Donohue leads a protest, it's censorship. He's against free speech." This charge clearly rankles Donohue, who insists—against considerable evidence—that he opposes governmental decency policing. "I don't want the government to be the agent of resolution," Donohue says. "I'd rather see somebody bashing my religion than see the government exercising censorship."

This last claim should not be taken at face value. Donohue's opposition to government intervention is such that when WNEW's *Opie and Anthony* radio show staged a live sex act in St. Patrick's Cathedral this August, Donohue's first action was to file a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), demanding that WNEW's license be revoked. The Catholic League has in the past filed FCC protests against a San Diego radio station and a WB Network quiz show; in 1998 Donohue went after the FCC itself, when a subscriber to the commission's e-mail digest posted "a joke that poked fun at nuns." As is often the case, government intervention is in the eye of the beholder.

But these were minor dustups compared to this year's revelations that Boston's Archdiocese housed a de facto pederasty ring that was protected by the church hierarchy. Suddenly the Catholic League was in an odd position. While the rest of the country was talking about child-abusing priests and their accomplices in the bishopric, the Catholic League was still denouncing harmless chestnuts about high-strung nuns and wacky confessional mixups.



"When this happened in Boston, I

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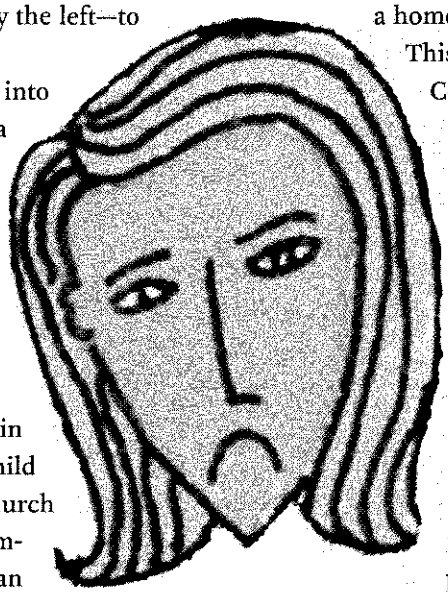
thought carefully, do I want to get involved in this thing?" says Donohue, who acknowledges having waited out the early stages of the controversy. "The reason we talk more about it now is that this thing blew up. And I wanted to have a voice of somebody who loves the church, who hates the abuse that's going on in the church, and will oppose the efforts of the left and the right—especially the left—to impose an agenda."



Donohue decisively inserted himself into the debate in March, briefly becoming a ubiquitous presence on talk shows and managing partly to direct the battle back toward a familiar enemy: Catholic liberals. He has become one of the major proponents of the thesis that the root of the problem was excessive tolerance for gays in the priesthood.

This, however, doesn't address a main cause of public outrage: not just that child abuse occurred but that a self-interested church hierarchy was willing to act as an accomplice. In April a widely publicized Vatican meeting of U.S. cardinals produced a lawyerly and mealy-mouthed set of proposals; at a June meeting, America's bishops, who had already emerged as the villains in the public mind, produced "zero tolerance" guidelines that made no mention of their own responsibility. It doesn't take a Catholic basher to be struck by the fact that a church uniquely confident in its opposition to stem cell research, condom use, and war in Iraq is somehow unable to take a strong stand against raping children.

Despite promises that he would not "defend the indefensible" or "carry water for the church," Donohue inevitably has had to speak carefully about Church pusillanimity and promise that real reform is on the way. Damage control is an uncomfortable job for him. In his element, Bill Donohue is a happy warrior, not an apologist. Witness a telling exchange with James Carville on CNN's *Crossfire*:

Donohue: "Most of the damage was done in the 1970s and the early 1980s. The cultural and sexual revolution that this country went through in the '60s, '70s, and early '80s had negative consequences all over. I'm not excusing it. I'm giving you...."

Carville: "I know. But I lived through the cultural revolution. And I didn't fondle no Boy Scout."

The fight has not gone out of Bill Donohue; he just wasn't born to be somebody else's straight man. Donohue promises, however, that if and when the scandal settles down, "I am gonna say to people: 'It's not OK to beat up on us just because we created our own problems.'"

Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom

One thing you can say for anti-discrimination groups: By their very existence, they negate the idea of America as a homogeneous, or even harmonious, society. This alone constitutes a public service. The Council on American-Islamic Relations, for example, keeps close track of the war on terrorism's erosion of civil liberties, if only because its constituents are directly impacted. Between the tyranny of common interest and the tyranny of special interests, at least you still have the freedom to name your poison.

"We like these groups," says Chip Berlet, a senior analyst at Cambridge, Massachusetts–based Political Research Associates. "It's a good question why a person who is sensible would like these groups, but it's because we don't think it's that annoying to ask whether people are being treated fairly—and to be able to do that without people running into a corner and ignoring each other. I want people to find a way to speak out in a way that is civil."

It's hard, though, to see how accusations of bigotry, sniping over political agendas, or appeals to courts and legislatures help promote civility. Anti-discrimination groups may in fact be most valuable when they are most combative, most obdurate, most willing to give up phony abstractions about equality for all and openly fight each other for crumbs of public attention.

Your meaningless cacophony could be somebody else's Whitmanesque symphony. It would also be somebody else's highly remunerative business, providing gainful employment for executives, clerks, and boards of directors. In this sluggish economy, isn't that enough? Even when there's little to gripe about, Americans from all walks of life can still come together and complain. We may be one nation after all.

Tim Cavanaugh (tcavanaugh@reason.com) is **reason***'s Web editor.*

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The Experimental Economist

Nobel laureate Vernon Smith takes markets places they've never been before.

Interviewed by Mike Lynch and Nick Gillespie

When **reason** interviewed George Mason University economist Vernon L. Smith back in May, one of the first questions we put to him was, "You're always mentioned as a short-lister for the Nobel Prize in economics. What do you think of that?" The 75-year-old Smith, the founding father of experimental economics, responded with a hearty laugh. "It's nice, but whenever I hear that, I always ask, 'Do any of the people saying that have a vote on the selection committee?'" It turns out that they did. In October, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded Smith the Nobel "for having established laboratory experiments as a tool in empirical economic analysis, especially in the study of alternative market mechanisms."

What do experimental economists do? "We take propositions of economic theory and we test them with real people in controlled settings," explains Smith, who's also a research scholar in the Interdisciplinary Center for Economic Science and a fellow of the Mercatus Center, both affiliated with George Mason. "Take the idea that there's a tendency for markets to achieve price levels at which they'll clear—at which buyers and sellers agree with one another and no money's left on the table. I'll run experiments where I motivate buyers to buy low and sellers to sell high." Smith helps keep living, breathing human beings at the center of a discipline notorious for transforming flesh and blood into impersonal theoretical equations.

"We're less interested in what people think than in what they actually do in specific situations," says Smith. "The thing that's not very explicit in much of economics is what the rules of trading are and how they affect outcomes. Experimental economics asks how the performance of a market is influenced by its rules."

Over the past 50 years, Smith has overseen thousands of experiments, including everyone from school kids to business tycoons to congressional staffers. He also has been instrumental in developing policies that create true markets where they've never existed, such as in electric power.

Smith has found that even when people have no clear idea of how or why markets work, they nonetheless tend to be both savvy and surprisingly generous. "I think we're born traders," he says. "We're social animals, very much into social exchange. This propensity of humans is very likely what led ultimately to trade and markets that produce wealth. The benefits of market exchange are easy to see in personal interactions, where you do something for me and I do some-

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thing for you. Out there in 'markets,' though, they're not always clear. If the price goes up, the oil companies get more money and I have less. That's the average person's perception and experience. Experimental economics helps put a human face on markets."

Smith's professional journey began at Caltech, where he studied electrical engineering before getting a master's degree in economics at the University of Kansas in 1952 and a Ph.D. at Harvard in 1955. Prior to joining George Mason's faculty in 2001, he taught at the University of Arizona, Purdue, Brown, and the University of Massachusetts. En route to winning the Nobel, he served as president of the Public Choice Society and the Economic Science Society, received countless awards, and published widely (Cambridge University Press has published two volumes of his papers in experimental economics).

Smith's ideological odyssey has been no less wide-ranging. He started out as an avowed socialist who believed that the good society was one in which a few wise men made most social, economic, and political decisions. Over the years, he gravitated toward a libertarian position that holds that individuals should be as free as possible to make their own tradeoffs. "Whether we're talking about politics or economics, or even social interaction," says Smith, "the best systems maximize the freedom of the individual, subject to the constraint of others in the system."

Contributing Editor Mike Lynch and Editor-in-Chief Nick Gillespie interviewed Smith at his George Mason office and a nearby restaurant.

reason: Experimental economics stresses the importance of institutions—the rules and regulations of markets and systems of exchange. Yet people often talk about the "free" market and property rights as if they exist in nature the same way a mountain or lake does. Your work suggests that these rules are created for specific people in specific situations.

Vernon Smith: I think a lot of market conventions and property rights come from norms that emerge through people's interactions. Often the state comes along later and codifies them.

Robert Ellickson's book *Order Without Law* (1991) documents this. He went and looked at what fence law is in Shasta County, California. The law makes it clear that you're liable for the damage your cattle does, so you have an incentive to build fences. But that's not quite the way it works. The reality is that people share fences. If you're a guy who gets known in the community as careless, as someone who doesn't keep your fences up and whose cattle keep getting out, your neighbors are much harder on you than if it's just a one-time-only mistake. Most of these disputes don't even go to court. There's pressure on you to pay up and settle out of court at a more expensive level.

It's interesting because people work out exchange systems that are not necessarily related to formal law. If you read [economist] F.A. Hayek, you know that the early lawgivers were not people who *made* law. They just wrote down the existing practices. This is what people are doing in Shasta County. It's "discovered law." "Made law" starts to come in later.

Of course, not every transaction is local or face-to-face. That's why you need more-formal markets and property rights. What's the old saying? "Everything for a friend, nothing for an enemy, and the law for strangers." Property rights and markets help to extend the gains from trade to strangers by ensuring payment or ensuring delivery.

reason: People are more likely to cheat people who live far away.

Smith: Definitely. But even then, perhaps not as much as we'd first think. Consider the Internet. What's remarkable about Internet markets is not that some people don't deliver

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or pay, but that it's so few. There's practically no way to enforce a lot of the commercial activity. The amazing thing about it is how much of what goes on does so on the basis of trust.

reason: What are the policy goals of experimental economics?

Smith: We know markets are efficient. We'd like to see if we can come up with market mechanisms that can be applied where they've never been used before. In electric power, for example, or in landing and takeoff slots in airports.

My colleagues and I have developed techniques to design market mechanisms that are likely to work in the real world. But we don't trust ourselves without doing experiments. The experiments are the means by which we test our knowledge. We use the laboratory to make our mistakes at low cost—and we make plenty of them. We always learn stuff and end up making changes to our model institutions, to our rules, and to our payoffs.

The next step is to bring in the people who will actually be using the system. They put design elements in, and then we run experiments with them. When they're comfortable with it, we go out in the world with it.

Here's an example dealing with electric power. Let's say you're creating a market for wholesale electricity. You have buyers and sellers of power at different nodes in an electric power network. People put in location-specific asking prices to sell power; they've got to be location-specific because power grids leak, and depending on where you are on the network, your costs will be different. If you're a wholesale buyer, then you put in a bid schedule at which you're willing to pay for power to be delivered to your node. These are all computer-assisted markets. A computer essentially takes all the asks, all the bids, and all the location costs and it maximizes the gains from trade. It does that by finding prices that clear the markets so there isn't any money left on the table.

We did experiments for this sort of system in Australia in 1993 and again in '96. We ran experiments and had a seminar a day for two weeks, and the participants got really good at it. Australia ended up deregulating its electric power industry, and I think they did a pretty good job.

What's interesting is that it's still not all privatized—that varies from state to state. Victoria, for instance, took all its generation assets and sold them off to private industry. In New South Wales, they're still held by public entities. But the important thing is that all power providers have got to get their money in the market. And all new capacity is completely private in Australia.

reason: So experimental economics can be a tool to show regulators and industry types how truly price-sensitive markets could and would work?

Smith: It is a tool. In 1995 the Progress and Freedom Foundation sponsored a series of workshops at the University of Arizona, where I was at the time. We brought in 25 executives who were high up in their organizations—Florida Power, Duke, Ohio Edison, Mohawk, Pacific Gas & Electric, Southern California Edison, and so on.

They participated in experiments, and they could see and experience what it was like to make a real market in power. One of the things we emphasized was the importance of demand-side bidding, where wholesalers are able to interrupt power flow to some of their customers to try and keep prices down. We had a client in Ohio that took demand-side bidding very seriously. In fact, they're having customers save money by agreeing to undergo voluntary power interruptions in certain circumstances. There are gadgets available that allow individual users to figure out what appliances they want to keep running at different price levels.

"The benefits of market exchange are easy to see in personal interactions, where you do something for me and I do something for you. Out there in 'markets,' though, they're not always clear."

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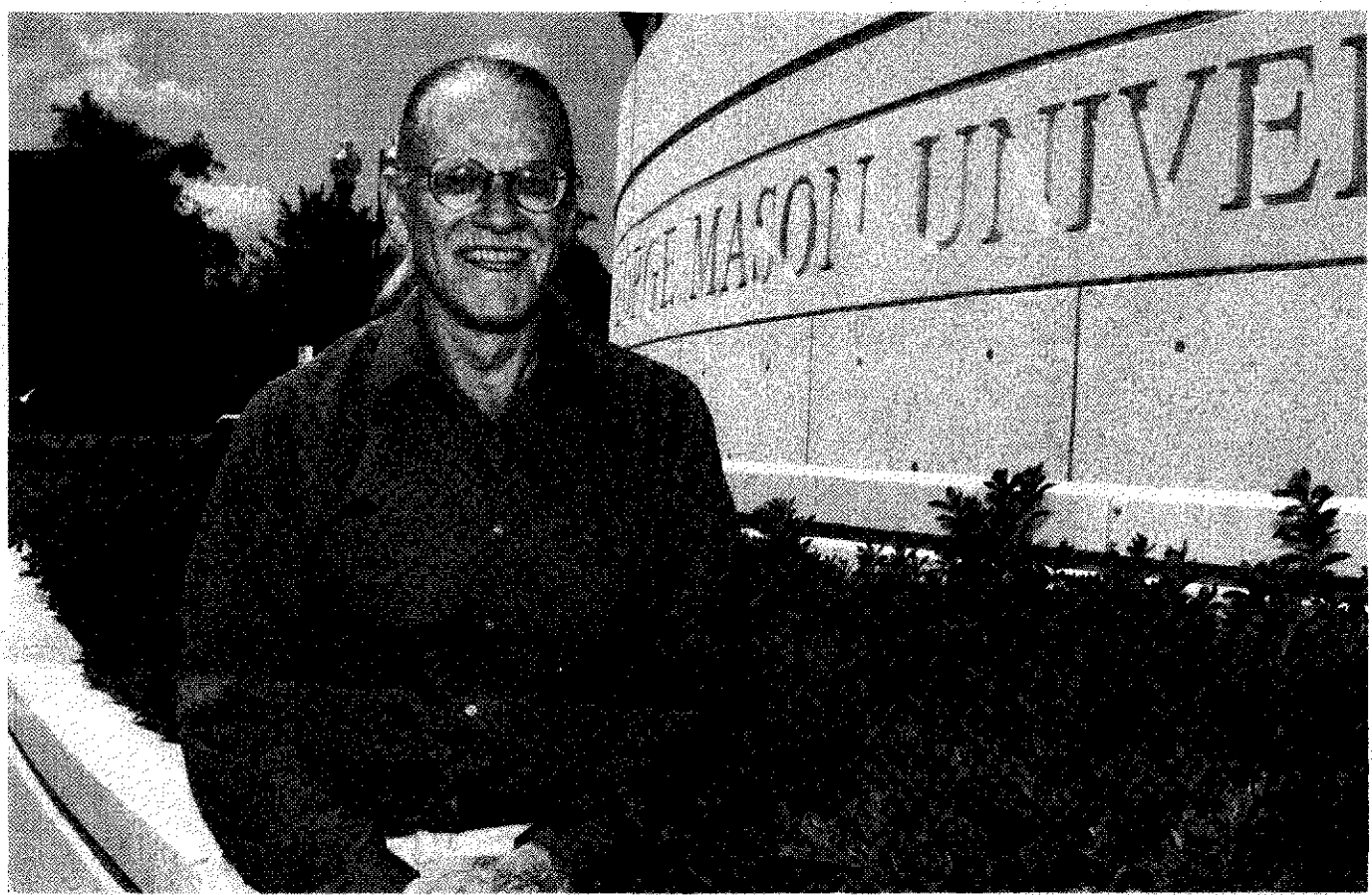

Customers can decide, "If the price gets up above a certain place, cut off lower-priority uses—air conditioners, hot water heaters, etc." If you do that even 15 minutes an hour, you can really cut peak demand.

The main problem in electric power is that there's almost no capability of interrupting demand in a selective way below the substation level. If you're in an elevator, if you left the porch light on in the daytime, if you've got a toaster running—those are all the same priority in terms of getting electricity in the current system. There's no way to pick and choose which gets cut off when demand surges, prices spike, and supply gets tight.

Both government and investor-based utilities have this huge supply-side bias: They provide whatever electric power people want all the time at a single, constant price. The reality is that the cost to produce and consume electricity fluctuates all the time because of changes in supply and demand and other conditions. It's like anything else, but it's hard to realize that without a visible market.

reason: It's pretty easy to see how people will respond to observable fluctuations in price: I'll turn off my soothing water fountain at 25 cents a kilowatt, but I'll keep my iron lung going at $100 a kilowatt. But it's easier said than done to create a functioning market, isn't it? California's famously botched restructuring of its power market underscores that. Not only did power suppliers help set up the market rules to begin with, they must have known that they would be bailed out if they could make a credible case that they couldn't supply power at the "deregulated" price. The state says sellers manipulated the market in all sorts of ways.

Smith: Sure, they're going to try to game it. That's why it's important to have the right set of rules in place. Nobody knows where exactly demand is going to come out, and sellers have an interest in trying to make that price come out as high as possible.

But the main problem is that inability to interrupt demand. You're talking about an industry in which the way they think about their problem and the way the regulators think about the problem is that *all* demand has to be served all the time. No one should ever lose their lights, and a fair price is a constant price over time. You always meet all demand. Well, it's impossible. You can't always meet all demand. You can't meet it in storms. You can't meet it when supplies are tight.

A big barrier to change is the local electric wires,

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which are franchise monopolies. For nearly 100 years, companies have been tying in the sale of energy with the wires. There's no reason the provider of the wires has to be the provider of the energy. Do you remember when Ma Bell wouldn't let you connect any telephone unless she produced it? They argued that they had to protect the "integrity" of the network: We just can't let *anyone* go in and connect whatever they want! It's silly. Why would anyone produce a telephone that wasn't compatible with the system?

That's all changed for phone service providers, but not for companies in the electric power industry. They're saying, "Why should we give access to our wires to alternative energy providers, especially ones who want to put in an interrupt device?"

What we need is a system where entrepreneurial types can come in and compete and try out different things, including the demand-interrupt system. Some will lose money and go broke. Some will hit it big. That's what's happening in telephones, and it's not happening in electric power. It won't happen until those barriers are removed.

reason: What are other areas where experimental economics is playing a role?

Smith: We're doing work on creating a market for the exchange of landing and takeoff slots at airports. In normal circumstances, those rights have been fully allocated among the airlines at a given airport. But let's say a bad weather front moves in, so there's a ground delay. They've been doing maybe 60 landings and takeoffs per hour, but now they've got to reduce that to 30. What airports tend to do is just stretch out the existing schedule, which leads to cancellations and other problems. What you need is a market mechanism so that the flights that have higher priority get out. What would be a higher priority? Bigger planes, probably, but also full planes and planes with a lot of passengers who have connecting flights.

Suppose we're talking about planes leaving LaGuardia in New York. If a plane's going to Los Angeles, it's probably the final destination for a lot of the passengers. Planes going to Chicago or Dallas probably have a lot passengers who are catching connecting flights. Maybe those flights should have a higher takeoff priority in bad weather. In any case, you need a market mechanism where the airlines can compensate one another—and their passengers—to cancel their flights and trade takeoff slots.

Such a system doesn't exist now. First, the airlines have to be convinced that's the way to go. Then the Federal Aviation Administration has to cooperate. And you really need Congress to approve this, since it gave the original allocation of slots. The danger is that Congress will say, "Wait a minute, we don't like this because they're buying and selling these slots. We gave them to you, and now they're making money by reselling them."

Another area for experimental economics has to do with NASA. We worked on the *Cassini* mission [which in 1997 sent 800 pounds of scientific instruments on a small spacecraft to Saturn to conduct experiments]. We used a trading system to allocate the resources that each separate experiment got to use on board.

Each experiment used three basic elements: energy, mass, and volume. The idea was to come up with the most efficient use of these three resources. We allocated a set amount for each resource. Participants were given tokens that were essentially money that they could trade among themselves. When the bidding started, the price of mass started out very high relative to volume and energy. Then people started to conserve it and, by the end, it collapsed. The price of mass collapsed!

That was the first space mission that came in without a big cost overrun. But they never did that sort of market allocation again. Why? Because there are a lot

"The two presidential votes I've felt the most comfortable about casting were for Socialist Norman Thomas in 1948 and Libertarian Ed Clark in 1980."

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of people that like things the way they are. They can run the current system and they don't care about waste. NASA's space station is now about $5 billion over budget. We've proposed selling enough space on that station to earn $5 billion. I don't know whether there's a market for that, but why not take a look at it?

We met with someone in the White House and there was some interest in it, but it takes a political entrepreneur to change that sort of thing, and it's very risky. If it doesn't work, you're going to get all the blame. If it does work, then everybody's going to claim to have been behind it.

reason: You started out life as a socialist but now call yourself a libertarian. What do you mean by that?

Smith: For me, libertarianism is tied to a certain set of recognitions: that all organizations have the problem of decentralized information, that decentralized mechanisms are the best way to organize that information to produce good outcomes, and that the best results come when the individual is free to make his or her own tradeoffs while aggregating information. That's true whether we're talking about politics or economics or even social interaction. The best systems maximize the freedom of the individual, subject to the constraint of others in the system.

I was born and grew up in Wichita, Kansas. My parents were socialists and our friends were socialists. We were supporters of the Socialist Party. My mother's first vote when she was 21 was cast for Eugene V. Debs, when he was in jail for opposing the First World War. My mother's father was an engineer on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. He was a great lover of Debs, who had organized the railroad workers. My mother ran for state treasurer on the Socialist Party ticket in Kansas more times than I can count. My first vote was cast for [Socialist] Norman Thomas in 1948, when I was 21. The two presidential votes that I've felt the most comfortable about casting were for Norman Thomas in 1948 and [Libertarian Party candidate] Ed Clark in 1980.

reason: What happened in between?

Smith: My socialist tendencies were starting to fade as I learned more about economics, first at the University of Kansas and then at Harvard. Then I began teaching at Purdue in 1955 and starting doing experiments in 1956. That really changed completely the way I thought about markets.

At Harvard I had been taught by Ed Chamberlain, the author of *The Theory of Monopolistic Competition*. He had a little classroom demonstration he did the first day of his class. It was designed to show that competition was not in fact workable.

In the fall of 1955, I was teaching principles of economics at Purdue. One night I woke up and I got to thinking about Ed Chamberlain's experiment. If you wanted to show that markets don't work, I thought, you ought to give them a fairer shot than he did. I thought I'd find out how they trade on the New York Stock Exchange, because if there's a competitive market anywhere, that ought to be it. I got a book on the stock market that contained all the details on how the trading took place.

The following spring, I conducted my first experiment, which lasted about six minutes. I offered no real payoffs. I just told students to think of themselves as making money—the difference between the value and price if you're a buyer and the difference between price and the cost if you're the seller. It converged on a competitive equilibrium. I repeated it and the same thing happened.

I thought there must be something wrong with the experiment. How can this be? There's not complete information, and at that time we all knew you needed that for efficient markets. Every semester after that, I'd do experiments with more and more students, and I'd change some of the parameters.

When I gave talks away from Purdue about what I was up to, I could see there were a lot of people who questioned whether this was even economics. "Why would anyone do this?" they'd say. You certainly couldn't make a living doing experimental economics. You had to do the sort of work that would get you promoted. That's when I learned something important. In economics every paper begins with a previous paper, not with a problem of the world. No one questions your right to do something if it's already been done. I did my first experiment January 1956, and the first paper about it was published in 1962.

These days, experimental economics is a growing subfield with international scope. Even Harvard and Yale have some people doing it. They've been very late to get on board, of course. If it's at Harvard and Yale, you've got to wonder if maybe it isn't time to get out, if it isn't over.

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Special Education Confidential

How schools use the "learning disability" label to cover up their failures

Lisa Snell

THE HANDMADE FLASHCARDS were not helping my nephew Clayton. My sister Linda confided: "He's not reading. We practice, but he can't remember the words the next time. He gets frustrated."

Although it seemed overwhelming, Clayton's problem was fairly simple. "If Clayton is reading the word *cat*," Linda explained, "he just says the letters *c*, *a*, *t*. He doesn't recognize the word." Clayton wasn't connecting the letters to the sounds they represent. Children often are taught the names of letters first, which can make it hard to learn how they're pronounced. For these kids, the letter *c* has no relationship to the sound *k* in *cat*.

Compounding the problem, Clayton's kindergarten teacher was giving him word lists to memorize, failing to recognize that he didn't know the basic letter sounds. She kept sending home new lists even though he hadn't learned the words on the previous ones. It's not surprising that Linda and Clayton were frustrated.

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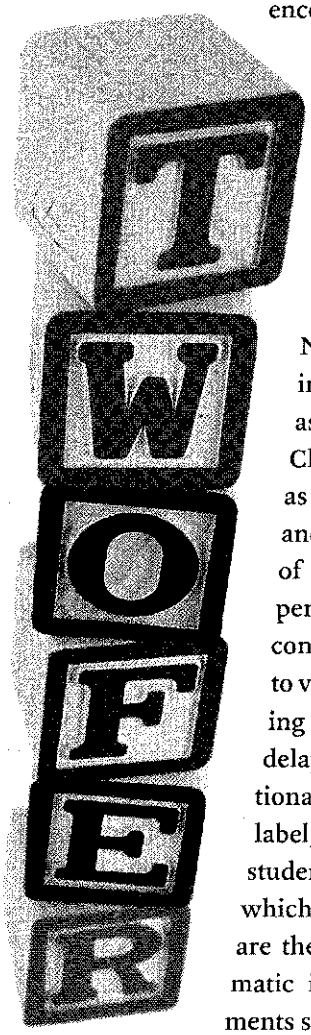
I was worried for Clayton because I know what happens to kids when they don't learn to read. Comprehensive research by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development shows that children who cannot identify word sounds in kindergarten often cannot read by third grade. If Clayton failed to learn the relationship between letters and sounds in kindergarten, chances are he would be assigned to special education by fourth grade, which would spell his doom in the public school system. He probably would never become a proficient reader. Despite attending a solidly middle-class school, rated 7 out of 10 by the state of California, Clayton could easily end up as yet another child labeled "learning disabled" because his school failed to teach him how to read.

This winter Congress is scheduled to reauthorize the Individuals With Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), which dispenses $60 billion a year to school districts around the country. While there's no question that IDEA has provided legal protections and services for students with handicaps, it has also created perverse incentives that encourage schools to call kids disabled as a way of attracting more funding and masking instructional failures. Instead of restructuring the program to mitigate these unintended consequences, Congress is set to simply throw more money at the problem.



Disability As an Excuse

Nearly 12 percent of American students in kindergarten through 12th grade are assigned to the special education system. Children with severe disabilities, such as mental retardation, autism, blindness, and deafness, account for only a tenth of these students. The remaining 90 percent are described as suffering from conditions that are less obvious and harder to verify objectively, such as specific learning disability (SLD), speech and language delays, mild mental retardation, and emotional disorders. SLD is the most common label, accounting for more than half of all students covered by IDEA. SLD diagnoses, which have risen by 34 percent since 1991, are the main factor contributing to the dramatic increase in special education enrollments since 1976.

In a recent *Education Week* commentary, Manhattan Institute education analyst Jay Greene observes that the SLD category "has more than tripled from 1.8% of the student population in 1976–7 to 6.0% in 1998–9. All other categories of special education combined...have actually declined from 6.5% to 5.8% of the student population during the same period." Greene sees these trends as cause for skepticism about the validity of SLD designations. "If a general increase were truly underway in the proportion of students with learning problems," he writes, "then it should be evident in more than just one category of special education."

Federal law defines SLD as "a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations." To prevent overuse of the label, federal regulations stipulate that it be limited to students who show a "severe discrepancy" between their achievement in one or more subject areas and their intelligence, usually as measured by an IQ test. For example, a child who scores lower on a standardized reading test than on an IQ test might be classified as having a reading disability.

Even with these criteria, an SLD diagnosis remains subjective. In addition to the federal standard, there are 50 different state definitions of learning disability, and the methods used to determine intelligence vary widely. University of Minnesota education researchers James Ysseldyke and Bob Algozzine estimate that more than 80 percent of all schoolchildren in the United States could qualify as learning disabled under one definition or another. In a 1986 study, UCLA education psychologist Esther Sinclair and her colleagues applied five different formulas to a sample of 137 children. Those classified as learning disabled ranged from 4 percent to 28 percent.

Andrew J. Coulson sums it up neatly in his book *Market Education: The Unknown History*. "In the world of public schooling," he writes, "SLD diagnosis is often reduced to a devastatingly sim-

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ple formula: if a child is smart but cannot read or do math, he is disabled." A consensus report published by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in 2001 concluded that it's impossible to clearly distinguish between an SLD in reading and low achievement: "Dyslexic children simply represent the lower portion of the continuum of reading capabilities."

A 2002 report from the President's Commission on Special Education estimated that 80 percent of students who receive an SLD diagnosis—two out of five special education students—are assigned to the program "simply because they haven't learned how to read." In a similar vein, an in-depth analysis in *Rethinking Special Education for a New Century*, a 2001 report published by the Fordham Foundation and the Progressive Policy Institute, estimates that nearly 2 million children would not have been classified as learning disabled if the public schools they attended had provided proper, rigorous, and early reading instruction.

Phonic Youth

In this connection, it's instructive to compare IDEA to Title I, which funds "remedial" reading and math instruction for children from poor families. Any student who qualifies for the federal free lunch program is eligible for Title I services. Although the government distinguishes between special education, intended for students described as disabled, and remedial education, intended for students presumed to be at a disadvantage because of their economic background, the same sort of intensive instruction seems to work equally well for poor readers in both groups. In fact, schools often pool money from both programs to pay for one general intervention, such as reading resource labs.

The SLD label is increasingly popular not because it suggests a particular pedagogical approach but because it brings schools extra money. The incentive to identify students as disabled is especially strong in schools with large numbers of low-income students. Such schools can obtain funding under Title I as well as IDEA, double counting each low achiever. "In essence," write Wade Horn and Douglas Tynan, "low-income, low-achieving students can be 'twofers' when it comes to maximizing procurement of federal and state funds."

It is commonly asserted that special education puts a financial strain on schools. Yet during the last four decades per pupil spending has increased from $2,360 to $7,086 in inflation-adjusted dollars, while student outcomes have been flat. "Whatever the causes for this productivity crisis in education (spending more without improving outcomes)," the Manhattan Institute's Jay Greene notes, "it is not reasonable to blame special education for consuming extra dollars or burdening schools with more difficult to educate students." Even as they shift more and more students into special education, schools have more money for general education than ever before. "Schools are classifying more normal but low-achieving students as learning-disabled using vague criteria," Greene writes. "Schools get more money for these special-education kids but don't spend much to 'treat' them."

Vouchers would discourage schools from overidentifying learning disabilities: Better to teach students to read in the first place than lose their per pupil revenue altogether.

This trend is especially troubling when one considers a child's dismal chances of learning to read through special education. The longer students remain in special education, the lower their reading ability when compared to that of other poor readers. As Louise Spear-Swerling and Robert J. Sternberg explain in their 1998 book *Off Track: When Poor Readers Become "Learning Disabled,"* "Poor readers in special education may be particularly likely to suffer decreases in practice, to benefit less from instructional interaction with a teacher, to engage in unmotivating instructional activities, and to draw maladaptive conclusions about what reading is." Similarly, a 1989 study by education researchers Richard Allington and Anne McGill-Franzen found that poor readers in special education programs received less instructional time in reading than did regular classroom students or Title I students. A 2000 survey of 500 special education teachers by the Council for Exceptional Children found that most reported devoting less than one hour a week to one-on-one time with students.

Unlike special education, early intervention with intensive instruction appears to reduce the number of children who have reading difficulties later in life. The research

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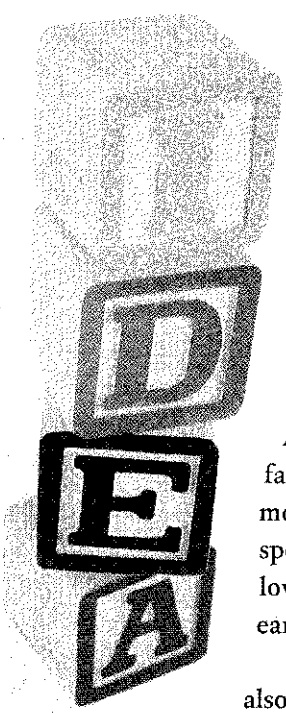
suggests that when children like my nephew Clayton are taught the basic phonological skills necessary for reading, they can avoid a disability label altogether. The experience with early intervention programs that emphasize phonemes (basic units of speech) indicates that the rate of truly intractable reading problems is close to the rate of other serious disabilities. In five recent studies, when kids with poor phonological skills were given intensive instruction in phonemes and phonics, the expected incidence of learning disabilities, originally 12 percent to 18 percent, was reduced to around 1.5 percent.

"The emphasis on prevention begs the question of what constitutes a disability," write reading expert Reid Lyon and his colleagues in the *Rethinking Special Education* report. "If the role of inadequate instruction is taken seriously, and more aggressive attempts are made to teach all children to read, the meaning of disability could change in the future. In this scenario, the actual diagnosis of LD could be reserved for children whose reading or other academic problems are severe and intractable."

Full Funding of a Bad IDEA

Lyon argues that complex assessments and disability determinations should be replaced by a system offering intensive instruction to all children who score below the 25th percentile in reading achievement. Whatever the eligibility criteria, it's vital that funding be tied to performance. In this respect, policy makers can learn something from child welfare reform.



Foster care funding is usually based on how many days children remain in the system; the longer they stay, the more revenue they generate. The unintended consequence is that kids languish in foster care, neither reunited with their natural parents nor adopted by new parents. Some innovative states, such as Kansas and Michigan, have tied foster care payments to the speed with which agencies find permanent placements for children. Agencies that move children into permanent family arrangements more quickly receive more money. Similarly, a better approach to special education would reward states that lower their disability rates through intensive early intervention.

Special education voucher programs would also help correct the perverse incentives created by IDEA. First, vouchers would allow parents to find the school environment that best fits their children's circumstances. Second, vouchers would discourage schools from overidentifying learning disabilities: Better to teach students to read in the first place than lose their per pupil revenue altogether.

Unfortunately, it's unlikely that Congress will rethink special education. It appears that "full funding" of IDEA—defined as covering 40 percent of the extra cost to educate disabled children—is a done deal. The Senate IDEA reauthorization plan calls for a $2.5 billion annual increase in appropriations, resulting in full funding in six years. The House Republican plan calls for full funding of IDEA in 10 years, including annual increases of just over $1 billion through fiscal year 2007. Large, predictable funding increases can be expected to encourage further expansion of special education as schools strive to maximize their budgets.

My nephew Clayton already brings his school Title I money, based on my sister's income and his eligibility for the free lunch program. The good news is that my sister has prevented Clayton's school from turning him into a "twofer" and assigning him to special education. Linda took responsibility for teaching Clayton the relationship between letters and sounds, and by the end of the school year he had jumped from a 1 to a 3 (on a scale of 1 to 4) in his kindergarten reading classification. It's the sort of success that could be far more common if schools focused on teaching kids to read rather than diagnosing their disabilities. ▮

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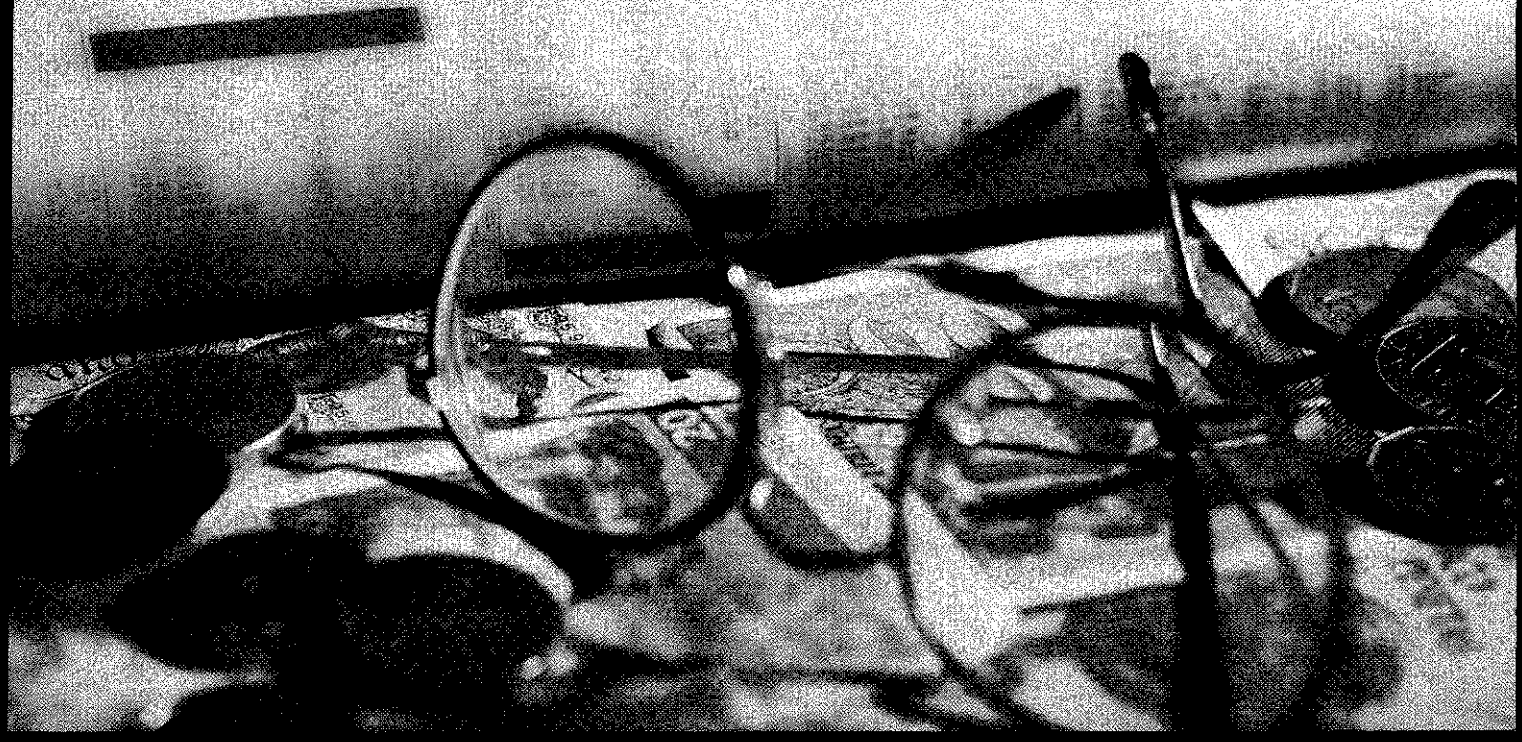

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Woe Is Media

It's time to save journalism from its saviors.

Matt Welch

The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, New York: Three Rivers Press, 207 pages, $12

The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril, by Leonard Downie Jr. and Robert G. Kaiser, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 292 pages, $25

Into the Buzzsaw: Leading Journalists Expose the Myth of a Free Press, edited by Kristina Borjesson, New York: Prometheus Books, $26

The Last Editor: How I Saved the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Los Angeles Times From Dullness and Complacency, by Jim Bellows, Kansas City: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 349 pages, $28.95

PROFITS ARE ROBUST, even during an advertising recession. Legal protections remain the strongest in the world, even during a time of war. Technology has removed most barriers to entry, ushering in literally hundreds of thousands of new publications, some of which are altering the very way we produce and consume the news. A day's work at the library can now be performed in an hour at your desk, using tools called Google, Nexis, and Findlaw. As a reporter, you can be in instantaneous contact via e-mail, videoconferences, and cell phones.

In short, there have never been better conditions for journalism than in present-day America. Yet there is an influential movement, and an entire publishing mini-genre, dedicated to convincing us that's not so. These scolds may defy common sense, but they're still worthy of attention because they represent the consensus among the profession's elite. At least for now.

Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel are arguably the two most prominent media critics in America. Kovach, a former editor of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and Washington bureau chief for *The New York Times*, is often referred to as "the conscience of American journalism"; reporting eminence David Halberstam once described him as "what the Founding Fathers had in mind when they gave us these great freedoms."

Rosenstiel, a former media critic for the *Los Angeles Times* and chief congressional correspondent for *Newsweek*, chairs the Project for Excellence in Journalism, a D.C. outfit affiliated with Columbia University's prestigious (though embattled) Graduate School for Journalism. These two are the go-to men if you need a quote lamenting the sensationalism of TV newscasts or a moderator for your National Press Club panel on "how to deal with growing business pressures in news." They are the media establishment's preferred voices of reason and concern.

So just what is that establishment concerned about these days? A clue can be found in the concluding paragraph of the duo's latest book, *The Elements of Journalism*: "Our best hope is not a future that returns to the past, which was never as sweet as people remember it. But our freedom in a digital century does depend on not forgetting that past, either, or the theory of news it produced, in a surge of faith in technological and corporate rebirth. We fought two conventional world wars and a largely covert Cold War in the last century against such technological utopianism. We may not survive another."

In other words, unless we all remember and adhere to a certain "theory of news"—Kovach and Rosenstiel's theory, it turns out—the United States might be annihilated. Our potential destroyer is "technological utopianism," which is apparently comparable to communism, fascism, and, er, whatever ism we were fighting in World War I. Secret-diplomatic-pactism, presumably...or was it Hapsburgism?

Such factually uncluttered hyperbole does not merely invite a certain awe. It also happens to violate at least one of the book's 10 proposed "elements of journalism." It clearly shatters No. 9, which states in part that "journal-

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ists should keep the news in proportion," and quite plausibly breaks No. 1, which says "journalism's first obligation is to the truth." Yet, contradictory as it may seem, such hot-winded "journalism of assertion" (another trend the authors lament) is actually quite typical of a curious movement to reform American reporting.

The Elements of Journalism—and *The News About the News: American Journalism in Peril*, written by top *Washington Post* editors Leonard Downie and Robert Kaiser—are only the latest of many recent books that reassert the media's core "values" in an age of industry uncertainty, vocational self-doubt, and an ever-splintering audience. But as that odd statement about "technological utopianism" reveals, these critics often flout the very principles they profess to protect. They also reinforce the mores of the country's elite newspapers while exuding a hostile ignorance toward the publishing explosion on the World Wide Web and the boom in cable news—that is, toward the freshest sources of modern media expression and competition.

Both *The Elements of Journalism* and *The News About the News* take nourishment from something called The Committee of Concerned Journalists, an organization of 1,500 worried people chaired by...Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. *Elements*, in fact, kicks off with the committee's creation myth, which positively oozes with unconscious elitism.

"This book began on a rainy Saturday in June 1997, when twenty-five journalists gathered at the Harvard Faculty Club," the eighth paragraph begins. "Around the long table sat editors of several of the nation's top newspapers, as well as some of the most influential names in television and radio, several of the top journalism educators, and some of the country's most prominent authors. They were there because they thought something was seriously wrong with their profession. They barely recognized what they considered journalism in much of the work of their colleagues."

The Harvard 25 charted a suitably academic course of action: They issued a "Statement of Concern," held forums around the country to "engage the public," and commissioned several studies, including one in which developmental psychologists interviewed scores of journalists about their values. The effort struck a nerve among a key sub-demographic of the news business: those who have safe editorial-related jobs at elite journalistic or academic institutions. (For reasons it might take a developmental psychologist to decipher, these people tend to be far more fatalistic than lowly freelancers, mid-market editors, and one-man Web site operators.) The end result was a cottage industry of media hand wringing, constructed on a foundation of relentless sky-has-already-fallen pessimism.

In Kovach and Rosenstiel's first woe-is-media tract, 1999's *Warp Speed*, fellow Concerned Journalist David Halberstam set the tone in the introduction: "The past year has been, I think, the worst year for American journalism since I entered the profession forty-four years ago." It's hard to distract men so despondent with news of such salutary post-1955 developments as female editors, 24-hour cable news, alternative weeklies, business journals, and fingertip access to 10,000 faraway newspapers. Still, *Elements* warns us, the situation decried in *Warp Speed* will seem like a golden age compared to the nightmare that is sure to follow if we don't pay the authors heed.

"Unless we can grasp and reclaim the theory of a free press," Kovach and Rosenstiel warn in the newer book, "journalists risk allowing their profession to disappear." It's a handy trick, to diagnose a terminal illness while claiming to corner the market on the cure.

Unsurprisingly, the authors take great pains to make sure we understand just how critical the patient is. The journalism profession "may face its greatest threat yet"; "conglomeration of the news business threatens the survival of the press

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as an independent institution"; "journalism independent of corporate self-interest will disappear" unless citizens "demand that their democratic interests be recognized not only by journalists but also by the corporate leadership"; "the revolution in technology and the economic organization it has spawned...are also threatening an independent watchdog press."

The humble 10 Elements of Journalism, we are told, "hold the only protection against the force that threatens to destroy journalism and thus weaken democratic society. This is the threat that the press will be subsumed inside the world of commercialized speech." And if we *ignore* the elements of journalism—well, as Basil Fawlty once put it, that's exactly how Nazi Germany got started. "History has taught us by bloody experience," write Kovach and Rosenstiel, "what happens to a society in which the citizens act on the basis of self-interested information—whether it is the propaganda of a despotic state or the edicts of a sybaritic leisure class substituting bread and circuses for sovereignty."

Although there is much sport to be had in watching well-fed boys not just cry wolf but scream "Hounds of hell!" at the top of their lungs, the journalism elite's self-critique does resonate on a number of points. Consolidation of media ownership is indeed troubling (notwithstanding AOL Time Warner's utter failure to colonize our mind-share). The exchange of knowledgeable international coverage for banal entertainment filler has not noticeably improved civic life. Local TV newscasts deserve their ritual shellacking for false banter, hand-waving on-the-scene nonsense from dull reporters, and the bottomless "new study proves it" well of medical stories. If you regard the United States as 280 million not-very-savvy people who receive their information primarily from the 11 p.m. Action News broadcast, *Crossfire*, or talk radio, then you might be depressed.

But the glass is not merely half empty. In 1980 there was essentially no desktop publishing. By 2000, a single newsletter-publishing company called Phillips Business Information was pulling down more than $100 million in annual revenue. In July 1992 the World Wide Web was in its demo stage. By July 2002, a single Web publishing company called Pyra Labs could report that new sites were being created using its "Blogger" technology at a rate of 1.5 per *minute*.

Reading media elites talk about the disappointing "news values" of small-market dailies is like watching Richie Rich lecture on self-reliance to a roomful of crack orphans.

On the rare occasions such numbers are cited in journalism-in-crisis books, they are cast in a negative light. Toward the end of *The News About the News*, for example, we learn that "in 1988 there were 13,541 magazines published in the United States; by 2000 there were 17,815." A 30 percent jump in new magazine titles should be unabashed good news, right? Not when your larger complaint is the "fragmentation of the American public."

Some cautious optimists might suggest, gently, that the public is better served now that it need not get its news exclusively from Walter Cronkite and the locally dominant daily. Downie and Kaiser are more concerned by the way this audience choice has "intimidated owners and managers of news organizations" into trying to "outpander" one another by using "fashionable gimmicks" to "win the contest for higher circulation or higher ratings, and thus higher profits, with sleazier programs and publications." All of which, the authors contend, has contributed to a "pervasive sleaziness" that has made our era a regrettably "decadent time." Before you know it they're off about pierced noses and "misogynistic rap lyrics."

Much better to be a well-funded newspaper with a local monopoly, and to avoid the debased life of a competitive news organization chasing down audience fragments. Or, as Downie and Kaiser put it in *The News About the News*: "You have to wonder why more news-media owners and executives hadn't noticed the fact that the country's best news organizations are also enormously successful. America's very best newspapers all have made handsome profits, and have steadily broadened the scope and improved the quality of their news coverage."

That pretty much sums up the recommendations offered in *The News About the News*, an embarrassment of a book that, if labeled honestly, would have been called *Why Aren't You As Good As We Are?* Neither Downie nor Kaiser has ever worked in any newsroom other than *The Washington Post*'s. Reading them talk about the disappointing "news values" of local TV stations and small-market dailies carries all the insight and charm of

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watching Richie Rich deliver a lecture about self-reliance to a roomful of crack orphans.

Most of the book is meaningful largely as a reminder of how poorly some well-regarded journalists can write (Kovach and Rosenstiel's crisp volume sings in comparison), and why sheltered people aren't always the best choice to write about the wider world. For example, Downie and Kaiser are so struck by their self-evident observation that the morning paper has more reporting than the TV news ("any single page in the newspaper contained about 40 percent more words than an entire half-hour newscast," etc.) that they repeat versions of this revelation 13 times. (I counted.)

Similarly, they repeatedly express displeasure that newscasts rely on video footage and graphics. They are outraged that TV stations in Los Angeles, a famously spread-out and traffic-clogged city, spend money on helicopters. They make clumsy errors, such as stating that the Gerald Loeb awards for business journalism are administered by the University of Southern California (it's UCLA), or that there were only "six American cities" with competing dailies by the 1980s. (They left out Philadelphia, Honolulu, and San Francisco, for starters.) Their optimistic hook—that news organizations and their audience might have been jolted into a New Seriousness by the September 11 massacres—has already fallen flat.

What's eerie is how Downie and Kaiser's beliefs, judgments, and even peer group mirror those of Kovach and Rosenstiel. There is a seeming consensus in Concerned Journalist circles on an impressively broad range of perfectly debatable editorial issues. Among the truisms, not even open for discussion: Crime coverage, especially on the local TV news, is invariably sensationalistic. Longer stories are better than shorter ones. The high-water marks for American journalism were the civil rights struggle, the Pentagon Papers, and Watergate. (Vietnam is also remembered fondly as something they bravely opposed, but what's left out is how most every major media organization ridiculed the investigative journalists who contradicted four successive U.S. presidents by reporting that American prisoners of war had been left behind after 1973—a travesty described by Monika Jensen-Stevenson in the anthology *Into the Buzzsaw*.)

Other givens: Political conventions should be covered "gavel-to-gavel" by network television. Public tastes are dangerously base. The three most negative influences on the profession are "competition," "economic pressure," and "audience fragmentation." Three good measures of a news organization's seriousness are its number of bureaus, its journalism awards, and its staff budget. Journalism schools are crucial. News organizations can indicate their sobriety by hiring an "ombudsman," or "reader's representative."

The books tend to praise and damn the same reporters and editors, with Matt Drudge leading the villain list in both. The man behind *The Drudge Report* is described in *Elements* as a "lone hacker rummaging through the databases and chat rooms," while *The News About the News* calls him "an online chat room gadfly." The latter book further claims that "for every Drudge 'exclusive' that contained a germ of truth, another proved to be

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wildly wrong." Apparently, extremism in the service of trashing Drudge is no vice.

This uniformity of opinion extends throughout the Concerned Journalists movement. To cite one example: This past April, Kovach delivered a speech to a convention of newspaper ombudsmen in Salt Lake City about the perceived tension between being a journalist and being an American. His conclusion: "We must educate the public. I believe it is vital to the interest of the journalist and the public that we engage in an urgent, forceful, and consistent campaign to educate the public that in a democratic society, the journalist is, in fact, exercising the highest form of citizenship by monitoring events in the community and making the public aware of them and their importance."

Thus Kovach exalted journalism as "the highest form of citizenship" and condescendingly suggested that the public simply needed to be "educated" to understand this. (Both comments are in keeping with a top-down worldview that allowed him once to say, in regard to Harvard, that "the best people really are the best people.") But instead of raising so much as an eyebrow, the gathered "reader's advocates" went back home and wrote about how smart Bill Kovach was in *The Washington Post*, *The Hartford Courant*, the Manchester *Guardian*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the Portland *Oregonian*, and *The San Diego Union-Tribune*.

When the feedback loop is set to applause, it's time to worry. Just because there's a consensus doesn't mean it's right. Many daily newspapers, in their Project for Excellence-approved keenness to avoid "sensationalizing" crime, have largely forgotten the art of covering it day to day, preferring instead to parachute in with the occasional series. Downie and Kaiser brag about a five-day *Washington Post* investigation in 1998 that used a computer-assisted researcher and 10 other reporters to uncover the fact that the D.C. police had the highest rate of "justifiable homicides" per capita of any major metropolitan force in the country, and that the city was quietly shelling out millions in lawsuit settlements. The series may well have been impressive, and it seems to have had a dramatic impact, but how in the hell could a good newspaper not notice that the local cops were busy shooting civilians and settling lawsuits?

The ombudsman, and to a lesser degree his cousin the media critic, are such widely accepted ornamentations on big news organizations that their existence is no longer much debated; nor are their performances given much scrutiny. This is too bad, because one of the things someone might notice is how eager conflicted publishers are to purchase the instant legitimacy of an "independent watchdog"—for instance, when Microsoft's MSNBC earned predictable applause by becoming the first online publication to hire an ombudsman.

The watchdogs themselves, who are frequently plucked from the ranks of the Committee of Concerned Journalists, have a noticeable tendency to lose their teeth. Kovach, for example, was ombudsman for *Brill's Content* when it formed a major new media venture with a gaggle of companies it was ostensibly supposed to cover. The controversial deal was announced on February 2, 2000. Kovach, who had a monthly column, didn't get around to writing about it until the August issue—his last at the magazine.

In theory, it might seem fine to appoint an individual as a quasi-independent advocate for reader concerns. In practice, four ombudspeople out of five spend more column-inches defending their newspaper's entrenched values to critics than they do highlighting its errors and weaknesses. Reporters and editors could

Great Escapism

J.R.R. Tolkien's pre-industrial fantasy feeds postindustrial entertainment

Jesse Walker

Each morning, I fire up my laptop and gaze into Hobbiton, a digital landscape inspired by J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Trees cast speckled shadows on the grass, and green hills sprout chimneys and little round door holes. In the foreground, a footbridge spans a river whose waters are churned by the wheel of old Mr. Sandyman's mill.

This idyllic computer image, a fantasy of rural living uncontaminated by modernity and advanced technology, comes courtesy of Vivendi Universal Games, a subdivision of the international megacorporation Vivendi. This winter, Vivendi is bringing out the first in a line of *Lord of the Rings* video games. Competitor Electronic Arts is likewise bringing out a Tolkien game. The release of both is timed to coincide with the premiere of *The Two Towers*, director Peter Jackson's much-anticipated sequel to his massively popular film *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Such activity underscores how intensely entertainment »

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obviate much of the perceived need for ombudsmen by taking the radical step of answering e-mail. And while the going theory asserts that the hiring of an ombudsman demonstrates concern for readers, a skeptic might suggest that it also flaunts flab. How many news organizations, after all, can afford to pay a full-time editorial employee who doesn't cover any news?

Monopoly newspapering in the U.S. is an idiosyncratic—and extremely lucrative—business, conducted largely by a small handful of companies. It is entirely possible that many accepted industry practices, such as maintaining massive staffs (the hardly top-notch *San Francisco Chronicle* has more than 500 editorial employees, for instance), are more accidental artifacts of evolution than logical organizations of resources.

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Four out of five new newspaper hires have journalism degrees, but maybe one in 5,000 have been plucked from the fertile minor leagues of online journalism, at a time when Internet punditry has exploded in popularity while newspaper op-ed sections continue to disappoint. The stock newspaper columnist caricature of the nonconformist, passionate, politically incorrect populist is found almost exclusively on the Web nowadays.

The question the Harvard 25 and other journalistic solons should be asking themselves is: If "everyone agrees" on something, isn't that a great place to begin asking whether it's wrong? This is the terrifying subtext of *Into the Buzzsaw*, an uneven but fascinating collection of horror stories and occasional tales of triumph told by more than a dozen high-profile investigative reporters. The book, which mines the fertile borderline between investigative obsession and paranoia, is chock full of shameful instances where the keepers of the journalism flame have closed ranks to shout down the work of mavericks.

Gary Webb, the former *San Jose Mercury News* reporter who wrote a controversial 1996 series connecting the CIA with Los Angeles' crack trade, recounts how the media critic (and former State Department spokesman) Bernard Kalb of CNN's *Reliable Sources* reacted to his work by complaining, "Where is the media knocking it down?"

Kalb soon got his wish, in the form of hit pieces on Webb in *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and the *Los Angeles Times*. Two years later, when two internal government investigations confirmed many of the key elements of the crack series—that CIA agents involved with the contras had direct dealings with key U.S. drug traffickers, for example, or that their superiors knew—the elite papers barely noted it.

At the core of *Into the Buzzsaw* are two long accounts, totaling 72 pages, by Riverside *Press-Enterprise* reporter David Hendrix and former CBS producer Kristina Borjesson, who unwittingly smacked against the establishment's brick wall after uncovering lurid details about the botched investigation into the crash of TWA Flight 800.

Both recount how a colleague of theirs, Kelly O'Meara, was trashed in a column by *Washington Post* media reporter Howard Kurtz mere days after conducting a skeptical interview with National Transportation Safety Board Managing Director Peter Goelz (who told Kurtz that O'Meara was "extraordinarily antagonistic").

Among other things, Hendrix and Borjesson were able to plausibly contradict government claims that there were no military exercises near the crash site that day; that there were only two military vessels in the area; that there was no evidence of explosive material in the debris; and that the suspicious residue found in the wreckage was a kind of glue. Both quoted investigators who questioned the official version of events. Yet Downie and Kaiser, whose paper hewed closer to the government line, bring up the investigation into TWA 800 only as a cautionary tale of reporting gone awry. "Ultimately all the investigators agreed that the crash was caused by a spontaneous explosion in a fuel tank on board," they state, falsely.

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But the main complaint against the Concerned Journalists is not their conformity, not their elitism, and certainly not their abilities. (Downie and Kaiser may have written a bad book, but they clearly put out one hell of a newspaper.) And *Elements* has many interesting moments, especially if you have an appetite for journalism theory. Kovach and Rosenstiel make some good points about the need for ideological and intellectual diversity in newsrooms, for example, even if they seem unconcerned by their own movement's tendency toward groupthink.

The problem with these successful old men sitting atop the profession that now gives them the shingles is that they make a grown journalist want to take up a new career, such as self-mutilation. Lord only knows what kind of prophylactic effects they might have on the young. Journalism may be a flawed industry, imperfectly realized, with many trends pointing in the wrong direction. But gosh, it's pretty darn *fun* sometimes, even if you don't get invited to sit at long tables in Cambridge.

Jim Bellows, the octogenarian former editor of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, the *Washington Star*, *Entertainment Tonight*, and more, communicates more joy on every single page of his breezy memoir, *The Last Editor*, than Kovach, Rosenstiel, Downie, and Kaiser manage to muster in 501 combined. Read Bellows, and you'll want to stomp out into the world, launch new publications, and, in his simple motto, "do your best."

For that considerable number of American journalists who've had the pleasure of being involved with start-up media outlets in the last decade, his forward-looking enthusiasm may resonate stronger than the Ivy League gloom of the careerists. Last I heard, Bellows was heading out to New York to help start a new magazine, while still shooting the bull about creating a newspaper in Los Angeles.

Journalism may need some long-faced fellows to look backward and tell us how things have gone badly, but that species is in more than adequate supply. What we need are more Jim Bellowses, and the good news is that the current scene—including but not limited to the wide-open World Wide Web—looks promising on that score. The academic scolds can sort it all out later. ▯

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companies are mining Tolkien's mythic Middle-earth. And why not? Millions of fans around the globe have welcomed almost every new product associated with *The Lord of the Rings*. Nearly 50 years old, Tolkien's multivolume novel remains a vibrant inspiration for all sorts of popular culture. Beyond the two video games and the new movie, there are spinoff books, CDs, DVDs, and board and card games. In a broader sense, *The Lord of the Rings* informs the entire contemporary fantasy genre, which would scarcely exist without it.

What's driving the demand for so many "Tolclones"? One well-rehearsed answer is that such escapism appeals to the economically oppressed, to those working long hours, to victims of "the machine." This take finds superficial support in Tolkien's own writings, which are shot through with nostalgia for simpler, preindustrial ways of life.

Yet the vital center of today's Tolkien fandom is, of all things, a Web site: TheOneRing.net, which draws over 1 million unique users per month. Far from seeking an escape from this modern world of machines and technology, Tolkien buffs luxuriate in its offerings. As important, the relentless commercialization of Tolkiendom has provided its fans with unprecedented opportunities to create strong, vibrant, and lively communities. Fans get together to play Reiner Knizia's popular *Lord of the Rings* board games; they travel »

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Fusion Power

Why only two parties is no fun

Brian Doherty

The Tyranny of the Two-Party System, by Lisa Jane Disch, New York: Columbia University Press, 194 pages, $45/$19.50 paper

THE TWO-PARTY system once severely strained my relationship with my roommate. It was the summer of 1988, and my roommate—also my best pal—was informally managing the local petition drive to get the Libertarian presidential candidate, Ron Paul, on Florida's ballot. He offered up our very small apartment—I was already sleeping in what normally would be the living room—as a crash pad for the kids who were dedicating their summer to dunning apprehensive and often hostile strangers for signatures in Gainesville's hellish heat and humidity.

I literally couldn't get out of bed without having to step across a well-meaning political neophyte. Since I, too, wanted Ron Paul on the ballot, I mostly swallowed my annoyance, but that sort of pent-up exasperation can wreak havoc on a happy home. And I'm sure the campaign workers were none too thrilled to be sleeping on a stranger's floor while pursuing their ill-paid, frustrating mission.

Under the best of circumstances, getting third-party candidates on the ballot is onerous and expensive. The numerous procedural hoops they and their supporters must jump through exacerbate the tensions inherent in fighting for heterodox political beliefs in America, adding heavily to the psychic costs of everyone involved.

Which means the system is working exactly as intended.

In *The Tyranny of the Two-Party System*, Lisa Jane Disch, a political science professor at the University of Minnesota, examines the reality of two-party hegemony. More than that, she lays bare the mental framework that she believes sanctions such a system. As Disch tells it, the two-party system dominates through more than just the legal barriers that require third parties to expend enormous amounts of money and effort, under restrictive and complicated conditions, just to get to the starting line of political competition. She argues that the system also works as a monolithic ideological construct that makes it difficult even to imagine a vibrant, multi-party political marketplace.

Disch makes an interesting and meaningful distinction between the reality of a system that has two dominant parties and a "two-party system." The first is quite possibly a necessary result of America's single-member-district, first-past-the-post electoral format, which effectively rules out the coalition governments common to parliamentary systems.

Yet Disch argues that the "two-party system" is something else altogether. It's a rhetorical construct that rules the discipline of political science and has become a veritable civic religion. She writes that the two-party system is a "system of meaning" that "associates third party candidates with lost causes, political extremism, and authoritarian populism while promoting established party candidates as the responsible and effective choice." Being third in a two-party system relegates you to the margins.

While the two-party system meets the known and stated political demands of many—probably most—Americans, it impoverishes our political discourse. It creates barriers to the creation of now-unknown political choices, in the same way that restrictions on introducing new consumer products might not violate any known, specifically statable preference but still diminish everyone's well being.

Although Disch spends little time on it, the history of third parties in America is fascinating and colorful, suggestive of possibilities largely missing in contemporary politics. Before the Civil War, a plethora of parties came and went, many achieving the kind of electoral prizes—governorships, congressional seats—almost universally denied anyone but Democrats or Republicans for the past century. In the 1800s third parties often arose to push for specific principles that more successful parties ignored or abandoned.

But these insurgent parties often quickly backslid on their founding principles when it became politic to do so. The Anti-Masonic Party, for example, was founded in the wake of the New York murder of a man planning to divulge Freemason secrets. It was dedicated to curbing the influence of the supposedly sinister secret society in American political life. Yet in 1832 it nominated for president William Wirt—a former attorney general and unrepentant Freemason. Similarly, in 1855 the staunchly anti-Catholic American Party, popularly called the Know-Nothing Party, found itself winning the governorship in Louisiana with a Catholic candidate.

One of America's current two major parties was itself a "third" party. The Republicans were formed from remnants of the Whig, Free-Soil, Liberty, and Know-Nothing par-

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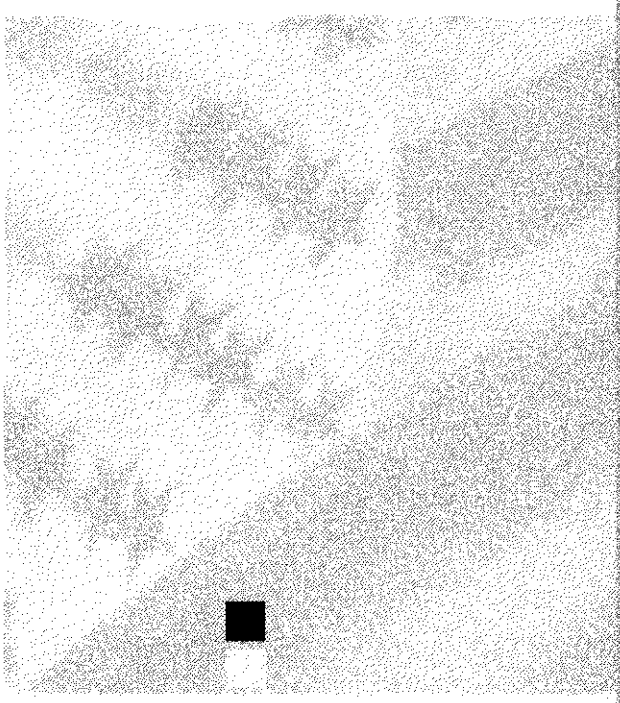
ties—basically, all the groups that fought against slavery's extension into new states and territories. The Republicans first won the presidency with Abraham Lincoln in 1860, only six years after its founding, in an election in which four candidates made decent (better than 10 percent) showings. That early Republican success doesn't hold out much hope for third parties nowadays, though: The nascent GOP's victory only came with the complete disappearance of the formerly major Whig Party.

As the 19th century wore on, parties such as the Greenbacks and Populists made strong showings by standing up for constituents and beliefs that the Republicans and Democrats ignored—especially farmers and their demand for cheap money. In 1890, for instance, the People's Party (the Populists' official name) won 52 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and three in the U.S. Senate. At the state level in the same year, it captured three governorships and majorities in seven state legislatures. From 1896 to 1916, nonmajor parties held six governorships, 1,761 seats in state legislatures, and 116 seats in the U.S. House and Senate.

Our contemporary fixation with federal (and presidential) politics tends to diminish those achievements, lending support to Disch's thesis about the "system" of two-party dominance. Disch documents how the academic discipline of political science uses "the two-party system [as] more than a term of reference. It is a *synonym* for the United States political system and an *organizing principle* for textbook knowledge of electoral democracy...it is one of several 'unresearched hypotheses' that orient action and speculation not because they are established in fact but because they have become 'almost imperceptibly...imbedded in the conventional wisdom.'"

She locates part of the reason for this reliance on two-party dogma in a larger demand of the social sciences: "The two-party system, like the military, the hospital, the education system, and the law, forms bridges between social power and academic knowledge. Like each of these, it orders human behavior so as to render it amenable to such characteristically modern forms of analysis as statistics and quantitative analysis." Disch suggests that concentrating on such institutions helps social scientists reduce the blooming, buzzing confusion of social reality into something simpler, more controlled, and quantifiable.

Of course, two-party power comes from more than just ideology. Around the turn of the century a wave of "good government" reforms began cementing the legal privileges of the two major parties. Through the 19th century, the government didn't control the printing of ballots. Parties themselves printed ballots for their candidates and supplied them for voters to cast. Within fairly wide parameters, all you needed was access to a printing press to be as legitimate a candidate as any other. The creation of state-



through cyberspace—and real space—to meet with their fellow chat room members. They dissect all things Tolkien and, rather than accepting them uncritically, argue endlessly about legitimacy and authenticity.

Throwing two new, graphically gorgeous video games into this mix multiplies further the possibilities for immersion in Tolkien's imaginative subcontinent. The world pictured in these games may be premodern, but high-resolution graphics and breathtaking computerized cinematography are central to the experience of the current Tolkien obsessive. (To be sure, Tolkien's devotees yearn to encounter nature too. Red Carpet Tours promises to take them to "the very heart of the magic realm," with tours of the actual New Zealand landscapes where Peter Jackson filmed his movies.)

The new Vivendi game has more going for it than just great looks. In 1974, Tolkien's influence on role playing games became apparent with the release of the pathbreaking *Dungeons & Dragons*. Soon after, Tolkien-obsessed hackers at Stanford's Artificial Intelligence Laboratory created a *D&D*-style computer role playing game called *Adventure*, which spread across the Net and deeply influenced the seminal game *Zork*, the precursor of *Final Fantasy*, *The Legend of Zelda*, and everything in between. Each subsequent role-playing game—whether *Myst* or the »

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issued ballots, with state rules for who could appear on them (rules designed by the two major parties for their benefit), helped destroy vital third parties by making it expensive—often prohibitively so—for them even to be on the ballot. The government takeover of the ballot was part of a general movement around the turn of the century to take power away from independent party structures and imbed it in the state, in the name of halting the evils of patronage and corruption. Not surprisingly, in doing so, the dominant Democrats and Republicans arranged it so that the new barriers and controls stymied their competitors more than they harmed the big parties.

Disch is not a disinterested academic studying America's two-party system. She has a cause to defend: ballot fusion. This is the once-prevalent practice in which two different parties nominate the same candidate for an office, giving voters the chance to select a single candidate under two different party affiliations. Now illegal in most states, fusion offers a way around one of the most compelling arguments against casting minor party votes: that such a vote is wasted, since your candidate has no chance of winning. (The "wasting your vote" argument implicitly assumes that if your vote can't actually sway the election, it isn't worth casting. But barring the complete miracle of an election actually being decided by one vote, you are *always* wasting your vote if actually turning the outcome of the election is all that matters.)

Those who want a world where government is less important might find some cheer in the fact that most Americans don't consider elections an important part of their lives.

Disch argues that hitching their wagon to more prominent candidates would allow minor parties to build up steam and gain legal ballot access (which is typically tied to votes cast for a party in the previous election). It would also show candidates exactly how much of their support comes from people of certain beliefs that might be a minority view within the larger party coalition. Imagine Greens having a chance to vote for Al Gore *as Greens*—and its possible effect on that party's future.

Disch's passion for fusion arose from her active involvement in 1994 with a Minnesota-based minor party, the Twin Cities Area New Party (TCANP). TCANP was a local branch of

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the national New Party, which strove, Disch writes, to be "a political home for progressives who saw no room for themselves in Bill Clinton's Democratic Party." The TCANP wanted to nominate Andy Dawkins as a candidate for the state House of Representatives, even though he was also seeking the Democrat-Farmer-Labor (DFL) nomination. (The DFL is itself a quaint survivor of an older day of more lively third parties, the result of a permanent fusion between an alternative party and the Democrats.) But Minnesota had a 1901 law that made it illegal for a candidate in a primary to also be put on the ballot by petition. The state denied the TCANP's petition to make Dawkins its candidate as well. The party sued. The case, *Timmons v. Twin Cities Area New Party*, ended up in front of the U.S. Supreme Court.

In its decision against the TCANP, the Supreme Court openly, tenderly defended two-party dominance, even though it's not a foundational part of the American political system. The Court's majority opinion said that states have the right to conclude that political stability is "best served through a healthy two-party system" and that they can enact regulations that "may, in practice, favor the traditional two-party system." As Disch writes, dissenting Justice John Paul Stevens "noted that the Court's emphasis was peculiar, as 'Minnesota did not argue in its briefs that the preservation of the two-party system supported the fusion ban.'" The two-party system held such sway over the Supreme Court majority that it saw arguments in support of it even where no such arguments had been made.

While Disch wants more space for third parties to arise and grow within the American system, she isn't satisfied with the ones that have arisen lately. She has little good to say about the third-party efforts of recidivist presidential candidate Ross Perot and Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura. Such candidates, she sniffs, "do not so much complement and correct the dominant parties as *mimic* them," adding that "if Jesse Ventura's success is any indication, the twenty-first century third party is more likely to intensify the libertarian leanings of liberalism than to challenge such fundamental separations as those between public and private, state and market, national order and global order."

That quote exhibits Disch's limited view of what valuable contributions third parties might make to the American political scene. For example, she never mentions, even once, the most consistently successful and longest-lasting third party of our era, the Libertarian Party. She has a highly constrained vision of what minor parties could and should mean: a more active left-leaning politics in America.

Disch does, however, correctly note that in politics we sit still for a restriction of choices that would seem intolerable in commercial markets: just two choices we have any chance of getting! The differences between the electoral market and real markets are perhaps too obvious to be belabored. But it's worth noting that it's an exaggeration even to say that voters get two "real" choices, since only those selecting the winner will actually get what they want. And if getting what you want means a specific set of policy actions as opposed to merely putting a candidate into office, any voter's chance of getting what she really wants shrinks even more. The old saw about those who don't vote having no right to complain gets it backward: Those who *do* vote are implicitly agreeing to the rules of the system whereby the winner takes all, and thus have no right to complain.

Proliferation of options, whether in the world of goods and services or the world of politics, leads to wonderful things. But the results are always unpredictable. It isn't easy to authoritatively predict what would happen if

multiplayer *EverQuest*, in which thousands of online individuals interact at any given moment—has its ultimate origins in Tolkien's Middle-earth.

Given such a history, Vivendi's role playing game arguably more fully embodies the Tolkien spirit than Electronic Arts' level-by-level arcade-style game (which doesn't even let you play as a hobbit or a wizard!).

But the game most suited to the modern Tolkien experience—one that combines technology, community, and commerce—doesn't exist yet. It would be a huge multiplayer online game like *EverQuest*, capable of blending the wired communalism of Tolkien fandom with fully interactive role playing. In the late 1990s, gamemaker Sierra Online launched a failed experiment to do just this. They've since been gobbled up by Vivendi, which has revived the project.

Whenever it comes out, the sales pitch for this one should be obvious: *One game to rule them all... One game to bind them....*

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Mike Alissi, Publisher

we eliminated the protectionist measures the major parties have ginned up against potential rivals. But it's undeniable that new ideas and possibilities would arise.

Similarly, it's almost certain that, as Disch argues, fusion would make it easier for ineffectual interest groups within the major parties to make a real show of strength as minor parties. This likely would cause the ideological dominance of the two-party system, which treats minor parties either as irrelevant jokes or as dangerous interlopers, to weaken.

In a system like America's, where a party can swing 49 percent of the vote in every congressional contest and still not win a thing, third parties are unlikely to ever fill many offices. But such parties can provide benefits to the polity unconnected with holding office. The public's imagination about political possibilities is choked off by two-party legal and ideological dominance. One political scientist waggishly—but probably accurately—describes the average American's political ideology as a "mild blend of consensus and apathy." The insistently bland centrism that two-party dominance creates bears a great deal of blame for that. The American system, unlike one based on proportional representation, encourages a what-he-said rush to the middle in an attempt to attract a majority, resulting in the proverbial less-than-a-dime's-worth difference between the two major parties.

Two-party dominance has not been rigid and unchanging, however. Today's Democrats and Republicans are hardly pushing the same ideas they were in 1860, or even 1960. But they do represent a consistent tyranny of centrism, and a generally unimaginative centrism. For example, both Pew and Gallup polls have shown 73 percent of Americans supporting medical marijuana, but it's a rare politician hooked up with a major party who dares suggest such a policy.

Whether Disch's proposed solution—abolishing anti-fusion laws—would really solve third parties' problems is uncertain. Still, all such legal barriers—from anti-fusion laws to absurdly restrictive ballot access requirements to campaign finance laws that hamstring minor parties' fund raising ability even while denying them federal subsidies—are harmful to a vital democracy and ought to be abandoned.

It may be, as political scientists who preach the gospel of the two-party system swear, that it really does meet all of Americans' political needs. (Even those who deign to study third parties usually frame their discussion in terms of what third parties have to offer the two-party system—for example, a harmless outlet for dissent or an incubator for daring new ideas.) If two parties truly are so satisfying, it might be because, as routinely low voter turnout figures show, Americans have few political needs that elections meet. Those who want a world where government is less important might find some cheer in the fact that most Americans don't consider elections an important part of their lives.

Brian Doherty (bdoherty@reason.com) is an associate editor of **reason**.

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Mustering the Little Platoons

One mayor's attempt to create active citizens

John McClaughry

Putting Faith in Neighborhoods: Making Cities Work Through Grassroots Citizenship, by Stephen Goldsmith, Noblesville, Ind.: Hudson Institute Publications, 200 pages, $19.95

Prior to 1965, "urban policy" meant a redevelopment czar, a master plan, eminent domain, "people clearance," downtown megaliths, and high-rise public housing ghettos for the displaced poor. In that year it became clear this was a recipe for social disaster.

The flames over Watts, the uprising on Chicago's West Side, the marches in Boston's Roxbury, and the turbulence all over America put the "plight of the cities" high on the nation's policy agenda. Thus began a 30-year experiment in urban policy, centering on federally funded "community action," liberalized welfare entitlements, and "model cities." All of this proved to be at least as ineffectual, disruptive, and ill-conceived as the previous urban renewal regime.

By 1977 neighborhood activists across the country had mustered enough political strength to get Congress to force an unwilling Carter administration to accept the creation of a National Commission on Neighborhoods. In their site visits around the country, commission members heard an appalling litany of grievances, most of them concerning injuries inflicted by governments.

Even avowedly liberal neighborhood witnesses blasted governments for their stupid rules, venal politics, lust for tax dollars, pilfering and wasting of funds, suppression of grassroots initiative and, with respect to neighborhood organizations, complete disinterest at best and inveterate hostility at worst. As Sen. William Proxmire (D-Wis.) ruefully remarked to a witness at a 1977 Senate hearing, "You would probably have better neighborhoods today if there had been no federal programs at all!"

The Carter White House clearly had no use for the commission's 1979 report and deep-sixed it on arrival. Ronald Reagan, before he became president, had derided "foolish government policies over the past several decades [that] have often worked to undermine, even destroy established neighborhoods," but his White House staff and Housing and Urban Development appointees had little knowledge of or interest in anything below the level of city government. Eventually, the movement for a neighborhood-oriented national urban policy subsided.

What had perished in the swamps of Washington, however, emerged alive in Indiana. In 1992 Stephen Goldsmith was sworn in as the Republican mayor of Indianapolis. (With its combined city-county government, Indianapolis is one of the few large cities that has a chance of regularly electing a Republican mayor.) He became one of a small handful of mayors, including Democrats John Norquist in Milwaukee and Kurt Schmoke in Baltimore, who, in Goldsmith's words, "tackled problems like crime, high taxes, and poverty by reversing the ways in which local government was actually perpetuating the problems rather than helping to solve them."

Putting Faith in Neighborhoods is Goldsmith's front-line memoir of how he and his administration changed the traditional rules of urban government by bringing neighborhoods, their people, and their little civil societies to the forefront of urban policy. It is a sequel to his well-received 1997 volume *The Twenty-First Century City*, published when he was in the sixth of his eight years as mayor.

The earlier book earned considerable attention for its account of Goldsmith's results-oriented management and path-breaking municipal service privatization. While it contained chapters on crime, neighborhoods, and civil society, they tended to be anecdotal and to recount ruefully some of Goldsmith's early mistakes. The new volume, which includes a 45-page case study of Goldsmith's Neighborhood Empowerment Initiative by Ryan Streeter of the Hudson Institute, is a focused, systematic, and remarkably perceptive primer for a neighborhood-oriented urban policy that works.

From his years as city prosecutor, Goldsmith had concluded that Indianapolis' overriding problem was a crisis of citizenship and a disintegration of local civil society. Over the previous 30 years, Goldsmith writes, "big government systems such as welfare created an attitude of entitlement among those in need and marginalized the local faith-based and other community groups that are often highly effective in transforming individuals' lives. Indeed, America's value-generating civic institutions were often derided as oppressive, parochial backwaters of bigotry and ignorance."

Though highly critical of traditional urban government, Goldsmith was no libertarian. He writes that "if

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ON SEPTEMBER 11, 2001,

A HANDFUL OF TENT-DWELLERS

THOUGHT THEY COULD STOP

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government tries to do too much, it often strips away the motivation people have to be engaged in their communities. If it does too little, citizens often do not have the resources or access to information to tackle their problems." He recognized that the great challenge is, as liberal thinker Michael Sandel put it, "reversing a pervasive sense that our most important civic institutions are unraveling and a feeling that we are not in control of the forces that have the greatest effects on our lives." In short, Goldsmith staked his mayorship on reawakening power in his city's neighborhoods.

To do that, Goldsmith operated from two fundamental principles. A healthy civil society depends on habits of self-governance and personal responsibility. Residents are wise enough to provide direction to their neighborhoods, and government must be responsive to this wisdom.

For those who came of age with the urban policy of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, this was a form of radicalism rarely heard from a mayor's office. It was especially radical to a generation of urban leaders who viewed ordinary citizens as potential problems to be entitled, delivered to, managed, disciplined, and displaced as might be necessary to carry out the Master Plan but never empowered to act in their own petty little interests. Goldsmith obviously has learned much from the writings of Robert Nisbet, Jane Jacobs, Peter Drucker, and above all Alexis de Tocqueville.

Goldsmith is committed to market forces as the ultimate engine of economic progress. He rightly takes credit for making his city much more business-friendly by lowering tax rates, scrapping counterproduc-

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tive regulations, and creating an overall environment conducive to enterprise. But Goldsmith believed that free market reforms occur within a matrix of cultural values and social capital. He focused his efforts on changing that matrix.

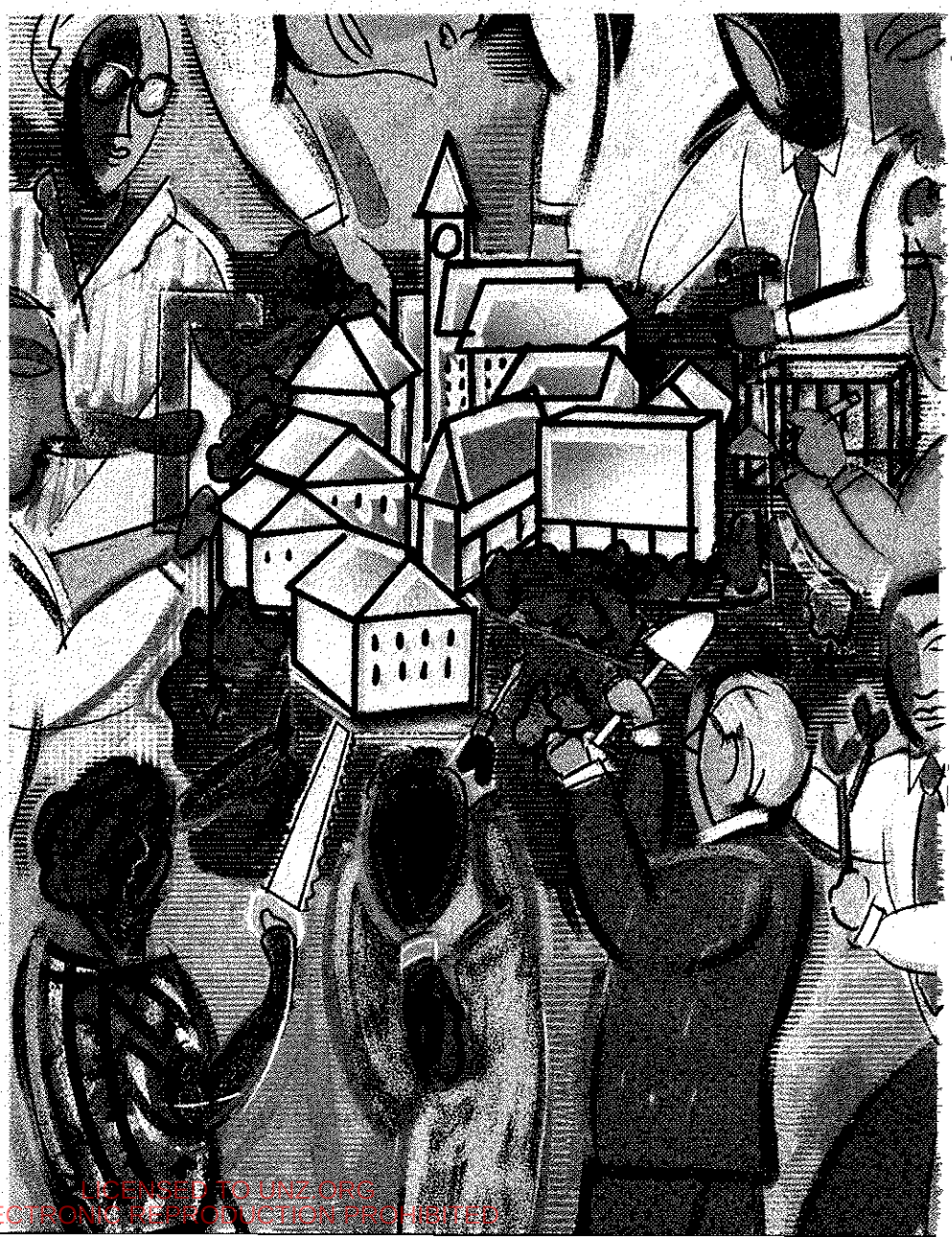
Neighborhood residents needed to know that their civic leaders heard and understood them. Goldsmith invited them into his office and sent city officials out to meetings all over the city just to listen—a simple, powerful, and surprisingly rare practice. Neighborhood leaders needed knowledge and leadership training. Goldsmith created a Neighborhood Resource Center to educate and train them. He brought in Robert Woodson's National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise to teach them how to run constructive grassroots organizations.

Neighborhood residents needed larger incomes. Goldsmith launched an innovative Independence Initiative, organizing business sector groups to line up job openings and employing the for-profit firm America Works to train welfare recipients and put them into jobs. Entrepreneurs needed opportunity. Goldsmith recognized that every struggling business and grassroots organization in his city faced a maddening array of government regulations, most of them of no value to the public. "Between 1994 and 1999," Goldsmith reports, "the [Regulatory Study] Commission saved Indianapolis taxpayers $3.3 million by getting rid of 157,000 processes and regulations....As far as I know, no one misses any of them."

Neighborhoods needed facelifts and repairs. Goldsmith spent $1.3 billion repairing and cleaning up streets, bridges, sidewalks, sewers, parks, and buildings, and did it without raising tax rates (thanks to management efficiency, privatization, business partnerships, and refinancing). He put volunteer county jail inmates to work beautifying common areas and parks (139,000 man-hours over eight years).

Neighborhood organizations needed funding. Goldsmith created a Community Enhancement Fund that made over 400 competitive awards totaling nearly $1 million to grassroots organizations. With these modest grants, Goldsmith reports, "an east side mentoring initiative arranged for twenty high school students to serve as mentors and tutors for nearly one hundred elementary school students. Groups turned vacant lots into parks, ugly areas into neighborhood gardens, graffiti into murals, and much more."

Neighborhood residents lacked self-governance. Goldsmith launched a Neighborhood Empowerment Initiative, hoping to move toward a true municipal federalism. It was, alas, thwarted by the City-County Council, whose elected members saw themselves as the only legitimate manifestation of government in their



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townships (the boundaries of which bore little relationship to actual human communities within the city).

The mayor realized that residents related to their society through faith-based institutions, which had traditionally been excluded from public policy. Goldsmith created a Front Porch Alliance, enlisting leaders of grassroots value-shaping organizations as intermediaries between people and city government.

So did Goldsmith's faith in "Tocquevillian empowerment" prove a success? Not entirely. Real-world urban problems are so deeply seated and intractable that it is rare that any leader can claim an unqualified success in dealing with any of them. In many cities the measure of success has come down to, "Hey—nobody rioted."

Still, Goldsmith can take credit for an effort that produced a lot of very positive results—not by showering neighborhoods with taxpayer largesse but by emphasizing character and responsibility, devolving power, and rebuilding the institutions of local civil society. His efforts won encomia from people such as Steve Forbes ("one of the most effective, innovative mayors in American history"), Mayor Ed Rendell of Philadelphia ("one of America's most innovative mayors"), and Jack Kemp ("demonstrated that expanding private enterprise, not government, is the key to efficient, high quality services and, more importantly, to the empowerment of the city's residents").

In 1996 Goldsmith—far from an ebullient campaigner—ran for governor of the Hoosier State. He lost by a five-point margin to the popular lieutenant governor, Democrat Frank O'Bannon. More surprisingly, Goldsmith lost Marion County (Indianapolis).

Social problem solving goes beyond the province of experts, planners, and managers, and that most baneful of concepts, "delivering services."

Three years after that defeat, Goldsmith abruptly and inexplicably announced that he wouldn't be running for a certain third term as mayor. (After leaving office, he became a major architect of President Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives program.) He had no heir apparent. The Republican nominee to succeed him was the Indiana secretary of state, with little experience in urban management or policy. The neighborhoods that had appreciatively voted for Goldsmith in 1995 reverted to their normal voting habits.

With Goldsmith gone, the city's neighborhood organizations—only recently empowered—were not sufficiently strong and cohesive to force his unwilling successor to continue his program. The new mayor, business Democrat Bart Peterson, promptly dismantled Goldsmith's alliances and initiatives, vetoed budget items for their support, and reinstalled traditional top-down managerial government. File the Goldsmith years under "Bright Shining Moments."

Goldsmith's book reveals his impressive philosophical depth as well as his practical experience. Unlike most mayors, he saw that social problem solving goes beyond the province of experts, planners, and managers and that most baneful of concepts, "delivering services." The key to success is the transformation of ordinary people into active citizens.

The recipe is easy to state but daunting to achieve: Empower people, enlarge their capacities, strengthen their local civic institutions, lower government-created barriers, increase information flow, create networks for expanding opportunity, demand responsibility and performance, and, above all, recreate a sense of efficacy among those who had viewed themselves as alienated and powerless.

Every aspiring urban leader should read Goldsmith's illuminating little book. Not everything he tried worked in Indianapolis. Not everything that worked in Indianapolis will work elsewhere. But the book's principles and policy ideas are perceptive and powerful. For any leader seeking to revive a lost civil society, they are also indispensable. ▯

Contributing Editor John McClaughry (john@ethanallen.org) was a member of the National Commission on Neighborhoods and directed the Neighborhoods Task Force in the 1980 Reagan transition office. He is now president of the Ethan Allen Institute in Concord, Vermont.

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Memory Hole

Why the left wants to forget Uncle Joe

Charles Paul Freund

Joseph Stalin made Martin Amis laugh four times.

Amis reports that he read "yards" of books about Stalin to write *Koba the Dread: Laughter and the Twenty Million* (Miramax), a meditation on the monstrousness of Stalin and the consequent historical vulnerability of a left that has never fully dealt with its past complicity in mass murder. Indeed, much of the left is still able to laugh nostalgically about the Soviet Union despite its unspeakably horrific past, and that, thinks Amis, makes it morally guilty.

"Nothing Stalin *did* makes you laugh," writes Amis. Rather, it's the things Stalin was capable of saying, "as if he were a comic creation going through his hoops." Amis laughs "undisguisedly and with warmth" when Stalin blames a 1922 grain shortfall on "a kulak strike," because the dictator so sure-handedly combines a pair of scapegoat categories into a single conspiratorial event. He laughs when a rueful Stalin bemoans Hitler's double cross, saying, "Tch, together with the Germans we would have been invincible." It's what's packed into that *Tch* that gets Amis.

Amis laughs a third time when Stalin speaks of the miserable Pavel Morozov. A teenage peasant, Morozov was a Soviet icon, a hero renowned for turning his father in to the authorities. Stalin himself exalted the boy, though he was heard to say privately, "What a little swine, denouncing his own father."

Finally, Amis cannot help but laugh at Stalin's reaction to the German invasion of Russia, on learning of "the true dimensions of his own miscalculation, paralysis, willful myopia, and lack of nerve." "Lenin left us a great inheritance," said Stalin, "and we, his heirs, have fucked it all up."

Did you laugh? If not, perhaps your heart is not sufficiently filled with despair. Reading accounts of Stalin by the yard will fix that, and then you can laugh along with Amis. He's distilled a good deal of the horror he has encountered in the works of Robert Conquest, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, and the many other historians of, and witnesses to, utter dread.

The left, to save the history it wants to embrace, has removed Stalin from it. He wasn't really of the left, it turns out. He was merely an "aberration."

Amis offers the haunting scene of Arctic prison camps where everyone has frozen to death—prisoners, guards, dogs, everyone. Many of them doubtless perished in a moment known to inmates as "the whispering of the stars," a last breath frozen in midair, the icy cloud breaking audibly on the frozen ground. There is the evocation of the Ukraine withering with intentional starvation. There are even scenes where the Russians, decrepified by the inanity of their lives, are themselves reduced to helpless laughter.

A Stalinist "election," for example, where the "ballots" feature not merely a single "candidate" but even a mark already placed next to the single name. "Voters" emerge from the "polls" doubled over with laughter.

Of course, this laughter of hopelessness contrasts badly with the outright smiles and titters of an aging left that still thinks itself perched on a moral high ground. Martin Amis, Christopher Hitchens, Diana Athill, Kingsley Spain Boardman, a card-carrying member of the Communist Party, wants to arrest the left's laughter so as to indict the left's enemies.

It happens to be too late, however, and the evidence is those very shelves of books that Amis studied to prepare his indictment. They've been there for years, offering testimony of a contained mentality that is hard to credit and much less rationalize. But the material of history is one thing; the demands of memory another. Confront Stalin for what he really was, and the entire structure of the left's intellectual and cultural heroes—the generation of men and women who served him and rationalized him—collapses on its head. This, when the appalling *Black Book of Communism* appeared in 1999, it was dismissed as propaganda in such publications as *Le Monde* and *The Atlantic*.

Stalin was reportedly fond of a certain saying. "There is a man, there is a problem. No man, no problem." The left, to save the history it wants to embrace, has removed Stalin from it. Despite countless testimonials from Louis Aragon, Lillian Hellman, Pablo Neruda, Jean-Paul Sartre, and others, he wasn't really of the left, it turns out. He was merely an "aberration." No Stalin, no problem.

Amis is wrong about one thing, however. Some of the things Stalin did can indeed force you to laugh. For a couple, hard frequently screen-

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a Hollywood film for himself, commanding the presence of a translator. For years, Stalin watched his favorite movies—especially Tarzan epics—as the translator babbled away. Yet in all that time, the translator was so afraid of saying anything that might displease Stalin that he avoided translating anything. Instead, he limited himself to describing the visual action that Stalin could see for himself.

How long do you suppose it was before Stalin caught on? Yet he let it go on and on. Perhaps even he was laughing. ■

Charles Paul Freund (@fpfreund) is a reason senior editor.

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Towering Stupidity

Charles Paul Freund

HERE'S NEW ZEALAND artist Gail Haffern standing next to her new installation, *Sept. 11*. According to Haffern, using passenger planes to attack office buildings was "wonderful...because it was a new idea." She says her work "asks the viewer to take a new position free of accusation and prejudice to view the acts of September 11 with a sense of amazement."

Damien Hirst, Britain's celebrated artist, told the BBC in September that the attacks had been "visually stunning" artworks and that the perpetrators "need congratulating." He later issued a statement insisting that "I value human life."

Hirst and Haffern were echoing sentiments blurted out in 2001 by the composer Karlheinz Stockhausen. He reportedly called the attacks "the greatest work of art ever."

These artists represent an aesthetic barbarity not evident since Europe's Futurists celebrated violence, destruction, and martial strength and then allied themselves with fascism. Indeed, the critic Walter Benjamin charged fascism with "aestheticizing" its politics.

Perhaps this too is "aestheticized" politics. Did the bombers of Guernica need congratulating? Was the obliteration of Hiroshima a wonderfully novel burst of light? Or is it only the mass murder of Americans that is art? ℟

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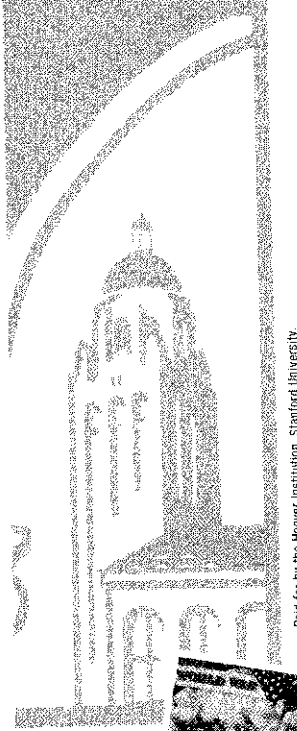
Reinventing Foreign Aid in the National Interest

Larry Diamond is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution and professor by courtesy of political science and sociology at Stanford University.



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September 11 brought home to Americans the need for a relentless global assault on terrorist networks and lawless regimes. But our national security also requires a global assault on poverty and development failure. Stagnant and failing states not only breed and harbor terrorism but also generate and spread civil wars, drug trafficking, organized crime, environmental catastrophe, infectious diseases, and refugee flows.

These diverse security threats spring from the failure of scores of countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East to achieve vigorous, sustainable, and broadly distributed development. The threat to global order does not come from poverty alone. It comes from states that do not function well in the public interest. And it stems from the frustration and humiliation of people who see their countries stagnate in corruption and injustice while Europe and America prosper.

Countries need help to develop, but the past approach—providing tens of billions of dollars in aid with no clear standards of performance—has not worked. Although aid has helped to improve health and living standards, it has failed to get at the root of underdevelopment. The core obstacle to economic development is not a lack of resources. It is bad—corrupt, abusive, wasteful, unaccountable—governance. **The key to generating development and building a more enduringly secure world is improving the way countries are governed.**

This key insight is now leading the Bush administration to reinvent foreign aid. This past March, President George W. Bush proposed the first significant increase in U.S. development assistance in a decade. The increased funds will go into a special Millennium Challenge Account, to be allocated to a limited number of countries that demonstrate a commitment to political and economic standards of good governance. President Bush proposes to provide $5 billion in additional funding by 2006 (a 50 percent increase over current development assistance).

A report released by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) goes further, seeing promoting effective democratic governance as central to fostering economic development. Hence, it proposes clearly linking foreign assistance to serious governmental reforms that will contain corruption and abuse of power. Where governments are truly rotten, the report suggests channeling assistance primarily through nongovernmental sources, working with other bilateral aid donors and multilateral aid agencies to establish clear governance standards for aid and coordinating pressure on bad, recalcitrant governments. Furthermore, it proposes to spend a larger portion of U.S. foreign aid on democracy and governance priorities: controlling corruption, institutionalizing the rule of law, invigorating political parties, and strengthening civil society.

This is the beginning of a new "tough love" approach to foreign aid. If we fund these initiatives adequately while holding to serious standards of governance, and if we pursue in other realms of our foreign policy the same commitment to promoting democracy and improving governance, we can turn the corner on poverty and hopelessness in the world, which would be a huge contribution to our national security.

— Larry Diamond

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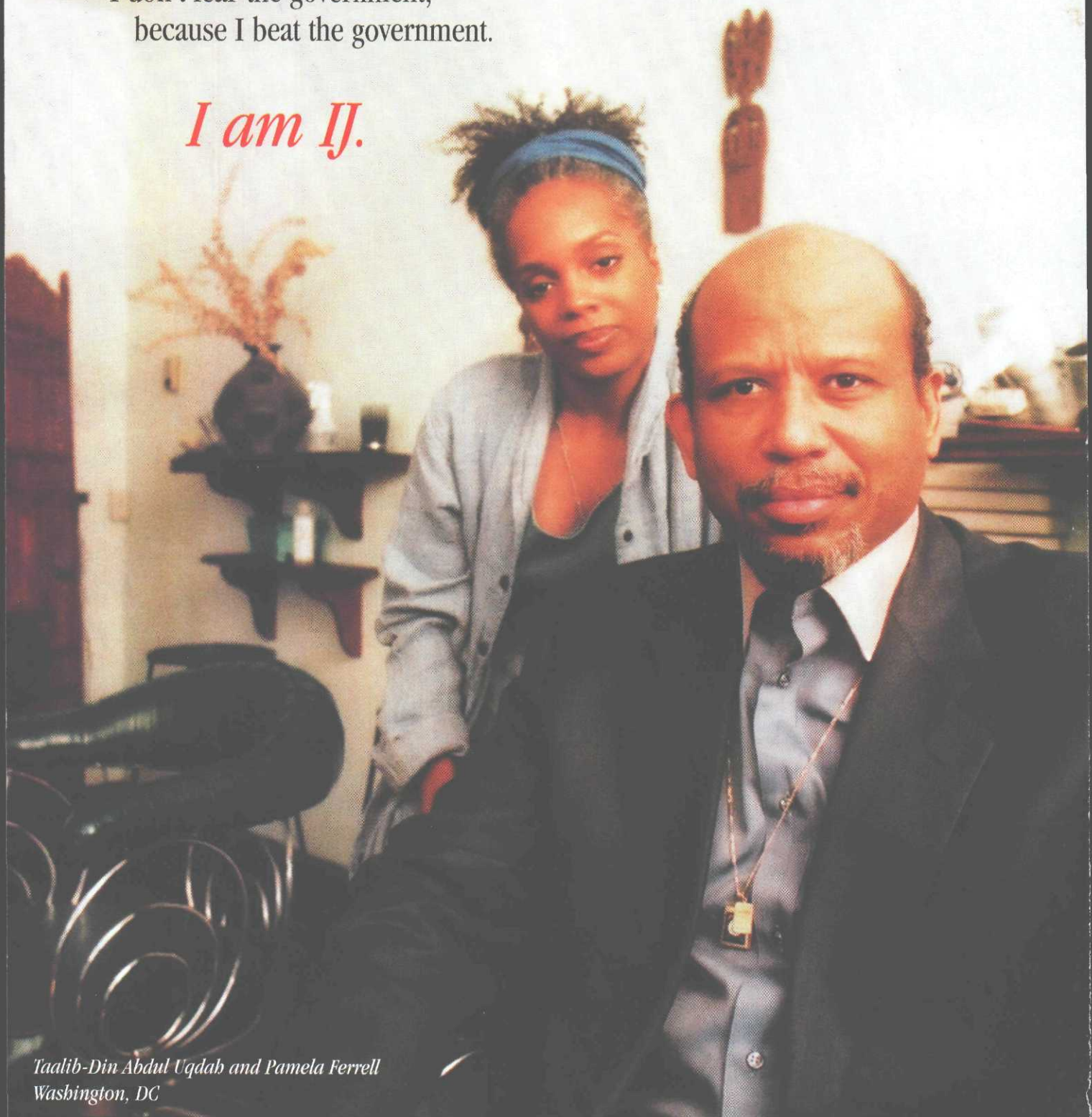

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